

Window on Jordan

Get run over walk on roads!

By Star Staff Writer

SOME PEOPLE are talking about a distinctly Jordanian phenomenon—people wandering off the pavements to walk on the roads—madness, isn't it!

Psychiatrists, psychologists and doctors have been consulted, and sociologists are dissecting, analyzing and offering their learned views on this peculiar "phenomenon".

The issue of "distinct psyche," is the key. Surely only a person with some kind of brain malfunction would risk his life on the road just for the hell of it!

There are, however, simple factors that apparently lead people do these things. Most people are not inherently masochistic—they are sedate, want a quite life, and certainly don't want to get flattened by a car.

So why do people do it? Well, I think there are two factors, one societal, and the other organizational. Its really more to do with city planning, or the lack of it.

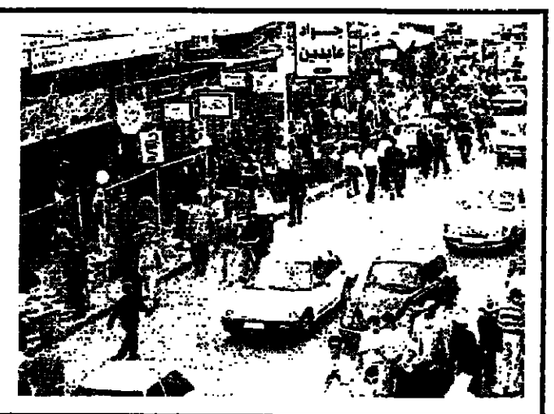
In a lot of residential areas in Amman, pavements, where they exist, are cluttered up with a most serious obstruction: olive trees. Outside their homes, people proudly grow lots and lots of olive trees.

On every pavement you can see olive trees—long ones, fat ones, skinny ones, and trees with exploding branches—all marooned hazardously on our pavements.

If you happen to complain—God forbid—that pavements are supposed to be for pedestrians, and not for gardeners, property owners will invariably shrug and tell you, "I don't care, this is my property. I can do what I like with it."

A selfish attitude maybe, but this is where city planners should step in and explain to these nice people that pavements are in fact supposed to be for walking on. It's one of the ways of reducing the

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The Star

Jordan's political, economic and cultural weekly

Le Jourdain
Supplément en français du Star

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اسبوعية سياسية مستقلة

Israeli President expresses discontent with peace stalemate

By Rebecca Trounson

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM—Leaping anew into the political fray, Israeli President Ezer Weizman expressed frustration Monday over the long stalemate in Middle East peacemaking and urged Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to hold early elections.

Netanyahu dismissed the idea, saying he intended to serve his full four-year term that is slated for late 2000, and said the Palestinians, not Israel, were to blame for the impasse in peace talks. "Peace is very, very close—if the Palestinians do their part," Netanyahu said.

The post of Israel's president is largely ceremonial and Weizman has no authority to set an election date. Still, political analysts said such a public statement of a lack of faith in the government was unprecedented from an Israeli president.

"The president in essence is lining up against the prime minister. He has no more faith in the prime minister," said Israel Radio political analyst Hanan Crystal.

However, some political analysts also agree that Weizman, as he often has, had managed to catch and express a public mood—this time, the growing sense of uncertainty over where Israel is headed in the negotiations with the Palestinians.

"Weizman is reflecting and articulating a popular frustration and confusion that cuts across the political spectrum," said political scientist Gerald Steinberg of Tel Aviv's Bar-Ilan University. "People gear up and down, expecting an agreement, then not expecting an agreement. Nobody knows where the country is going with the peace process."

Netanyahu's allies in the conservative Likud party and within his government criticized the outspoken president for breaking the unwritten rules of his office and weighing in on political matters. Even some left-leaning members of the Israeli parliament said Weizman should refrain from making his views public at a sensitive time in the negotiations.

But other opposition leaders, who promptly echoed Weizman's call for early elections, praised him for expressing the fears of many Israelis that the peace process, launched five years ago but deadlocked for 15 months, may be drawing its final breaths.



Netanyahu



Weizman

Weizman told reporters in Jerusalem that the US mediated peace negotiations were "limping" and noted that the prime minister had apparently dropped a recent idea to hold a national referendum on Israel's long-delayed promise to turn over more West Bank land to the Palestinians.

The referendum, along with a Netanyahu suggestion for another international peace conference on the Middle East, has drawn widespread criticism from Palestinian officials and opposition figures who see it as a bid to delay transferring more land to Palestinian control.

But Weizman suggested that if Netanyahu is indeed interested in public opinion on his peace policies, he should call for early elections. "If he does not hold a referendum, then I believe the next solution should be elections ... and the sooner we hold them, the sooner we'll know what the public thinks," the president said.

Opinion polls have shown strong public support for a US proposal that Israeli troops withdraw from another 13 percent of the West Bank in exchange for a concrete security program and other measures from the Palestinians. The Palestinians have accepted the US plan but Netanyahu has resisted, asserting that it would endanger Israel's security..

Speaking at a Jerusalem news conference with the visiting Spanish prime minister, Netanyahu again accused the Palestinians of failing to meet their obligations under existing peace deals and said he was working "day and night" to achieve a strong agreement that would give Israel a secure peace. He declined to comment on whether Weizman had overstepped the ceremonial bounds of his office.

But Weizman himself appeared happy to comment. The maverick president also left no doubt that he fully intended to weather any political storm his latest remarks cause. "I planned this and waited for the right occasion," he said.

And Monday evening, in a long television interview, he fired back at critics who said he should stay out of politics, pointing out that Netanyahu has often sought his help in persuading Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and US mediators to give Israel more time to make progress toward peace.

Meanwhile Israeli seems to be having trouble on the international level. Israel came under attack at the UN Security Council over its controversial plan to enlarge the City of Jerusalem. Nasser Al Qidwa, Palestinian observor at the UN is calling the Israeli plan to extend the municipal umbrella of Jerusalem as "illegal, appall-

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A young boy is washed by his father outside their small canal-side house, Wednesday, near Beijing. Life in Beijing returned to normal after US President Bill Clinton's four-day visit to the capital ended. Clinton is presently in Shanghai and Guilin, and is also visiting Hong Kong.

AFP photo

Larger local councils planned to offset debt problems

By Ibtisam Awadat

Star Staff Writer

LOCAL COUNCIL debt has been in the news for a long time. Today, the situation has become so bad, there are now detailed plans to merge the 670 local institutions, municipalities and rural commissions into 50 Greater Councils, to create more accountability and easier financing.

Despite the financial problems, local councils continue to provide services to the local population, and inevitably, these services need financing. "Our municipality ran into financial problems because of the services we provide," said Musa Al Saad, mayor of the Russaifa Municipality which received JD 2.75 million last year to meet its responsibilities. "But our dilemma is the debts that we have to repay. These have reached JD 1.23 million." Mr Saad pointed out that the debt increased as a result of increased expenditure on services, roads, new public parks, land surveying etc.

The mayor said land prices have increased as a result of the various services provided by the municipality, and yet, the municipality receives no revenue from this, as all taxes go straight to the Ministry of Finance. In this respect, Mr Saad urged the government to devote some tax revenue directly to the municipalities. In Russaifa, whose population numbers 350,000, people have been calling on the government to remove a garbage dump which has been a source of pollution in the area. "At long last officials have responded to our demand and the dump will be removed soon," Saad added.

Things are beginning to look up. A development project in Russeifa has been drawn up and is now awaiting funding. "The cost is about JD 1 million, although so far we have only managed to receive approval for JD 300,000 from the bank. We are working to get a better offer," the mayor explained.

Municipalities often face difficulties of this nature. Take the case of Mleeh, a municipality 18 kilometers south of Madaba.

"In the municipality we do not have investment projects, since our present priority is to improve the quality of service in the local region," said Mayor Sanad Qbeilat. "These current projects are the cause of our debts and we have to pay JD 20,000 to provide them. Our annual budget for this year is JD 141,000," Qbeilat added.

Because of these problems, a government bank linked to the Ministry of Rural Municipal Affairs and Environment was established to provide more flexible services to the municipalities.

"We grant loans to municipalities both for services and development projects," said Hamad Al Kasasbeh, director of the Developing Cities and Villages Bank (DCVB). The most common complaint to the DCVB is that infrastructure projects are consuming the greater part of the municipality budgets.

Figures provided by the director are revealing and illustrate the size of the problem.

"The bank wants JD 80 million from the municipalities, to repay loans which have finance different kinds of projects, or compensation payments to deserving people," Kasasbeh explained.

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Lloyds inspection team in Aqaba under fire

By Ilham Sadeq

Star Staff Writer

JORDANIAN INDUSTRIALISTS and shipping agents have repeatedly called on the government to intervene to remove the Lloyds Register team from the Aqaba port. Their prime objections is the huge cost to Jordan to keep the operation running on the shores of Aqaba.

At long last their calls are being heard by the government. Businessmen and shippers maintain that the existence of Lloyds is a hindrance to trade and makes the clearing of goods a much more complicated process with endless delays and material losses.

The Lloyds Register team was designated in 1994 to check goods coming via Aqaba to ensure that they don't go on to Iraq, which has been under UN sanctions since its invasion of Kuwait in 1991.

When the Lloyds team first started their operation in Aqaba, shipping agents were forced to give their approval by the government who regarded as better than having checking operations run by American, British and French naval vessels patrolling the Arabian Gulf and the Red Sea.

Some Jordanians have since said that allowing the foreign regime to operate in Aqaba is an incursion of Jordan's sovereignty. "We reject the existence of Lloyds Register at Aqaba—it is nothing but a blockade or a siege on Jordan," President of the Shipping Forwarders Association, Saleem Jadoun, told *The Star*.

However, at the time, its the Lloyds operation was deemed better than that of the naval vessels, which forced shipping agents to leave enough space between containers on the ships to facilitate the inspection of cargo.

"This has naturally led to extra costs, borne by the importers, who were obliged to reduce the number of containers and hire more ships to carry their goods," Jadoun added.

So, the solution was to bring the Lloyds team to Aqaba. In the beginning the team did its job properly. However, a year and a half ago problems started with the Lloyds Register being accused of interfering by inspecting and opening all containers carrying goods to Jordan, claiming they were bound for Iraq.

"Because this team have gone beyond the limit of their assigned task, we have sent a memo to the government calling on them to put a stop to this unnecessary hassle and to remove the inspection team from the harbor," Jadoun maintained.

The procedure has also been an additional burden on the state's coffers. What angers the private sector is the fact that the government pays somewhere in the region of $3 million annually to Lloyds to cover the wages of inspection officers.

Pressure for the removal of the inspection team has come from other corners as well. The 1996 'oil for food' deal between the UN and Iraq means that an inspection team in Aqaba has become obsolete, and has pushed local industrialists to become more vociferous in their protest.

"Last year we called for official intervention as the sanctions seemed to be easing in the light of this formula, and this task is now carried out by UN inspectors on Iraqi land," Jadoun said. Initially the government's response was not encouraging, although this has changed recently.

Informed sources suggest that Jordan has made intensive diplomatic contacts to end the

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Britain's Millennium Dome: A boon or a boondoggle?

World Report

By Vanora Bennett

LONDON—Something that looks like a giant tent has sprung up where the millennium will begin, and Britain's politicians are rejoicing.

Construction of the outer skin of the billion-dollar Millennium Dome, twice the size of Britain's largest soccer stadium, was completed this week, and Prime Minister Tony Blair says it's so good it should be kept for posterity. The dome ought "not to be torn down after a year as we previously envisaged," Blair said, wearing a yellow hard hat and looking elated as hetoured the Greenwich riverside site east of London on Monday. "When I look at it and I see it today, I think this is too good to be torn down. We should have a use for this and a use that lasts."

He didn't specify what that use would be. Right now, the plan is for the exhibition center to combine an auditorium with about a dozen pavilions with themes such as time, the environment and education.

British politicians like to argue that the millennium—technically—starts in Britain. This is because Greenwich is the meridian line marking zero degrees of longitude, from which hours forward or back are conventionally reckoned.

But although the futuristic dome is the darling of Britain's hip Labor government, it has aroused widespread skepticism in a nation that suspects it may be no more than an elaborate exercise in hype and a huge waste of money.

Blair may call it "a symbol of British confidence, a monument to our creativity and a fantastic day out," but a recent poll by the MORI company found that only 8 percent of the public thinks that building it was appropriate. Respondents of another survey in March, a Gallup poll published in the conservative Daily Telegraph newspaper, expressed indignation at the amount of money being lavished on the center. Most said they would rather that the funding, half from government coffers and half privately raised, was used to improve hospitals (59 percent of respondents) or public schools (25 percent of respondents). But one in five also expect to visit the dome, at about $30 a pop. About 12 million people are expected in the first year.



More grumbles have been reported in the media about whether contractors for the dome are British enough; why European-style cafes and not British pubs are being encouraged in the vicinity; whether the millennium should be celebrated with more explicit Christian symbolism; and whether local people should be moved from public housing in Greenwich to make way for the dome.

"The British government will be spending the equivalent of 12 percent of its annual defense budget on a calendar event whose meaning and importance none of those involved can, it seems, convincingly summarize," the weekly Economist magazine complained.

In a sign of Britain's current high confi-

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King praises armed forces

HIS MAJESTY King Hussein, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, paid tribute to the Jordanian armed forces for their sacrifices over the years in defending Arab causes and Arab land.

"This is Jordan, whose army is the Army of the Great Arab Revolt," the King said in an address at the graduation ceremony of the 11th batch of Muata University Military Wing. "This is Jordan, which embraces and safeguards the principles and objectives of the Arab movement towards genuine progress." His Majesty added. "This is Jordan, which always stands by its brothers in difficult times, sacrificing its blood and everything that is dear to it to defend its brothers wherever they are."

The King also urged Jordan's minority to stop belittling the nation's accomplishments, saying, "We pray to Allah that the small minority will stop self-punishment and stop playing down Jordan's achievements and its steadfastness in face of all challenges and dangers." His Majesty said.

The King was optimistic about the future, describing it as "promising" and "good." He stressed that Arab coordination and integration will be realized in the future because it is in the interest of the Arab nations. ■





For the Record

Majali briefs cabinet

AMMAN (Petra)—Prime Minister Abdel Salam Majali on Sunday sent a cable of condolences to Turkish Prime Minister Masout Yelmaz expressing his sorrow for the victims of the earthquake that hit south eastern Turkey claiming the lives of scores of victims. The Prime Minister on Sunday phoned the Jordanian Ambassador in Turkey Dr Mousa Breizat who assured the Prime Minister that all Jordanians in Turkey are safe and in sound health following the earthquake that struck southern Turkey on Saturday. Majali asked Breizat to convey the Jordanian government's condolences to the Turkish government and to the families of the victims.

Majali meets Algerian Minister

AMMAN (Petra)—Prime Minister Abdel Salam Majali met on Sunday the Algerian Minister of Industry and Restructuring Abdel Majid Manasrah. Dr Majali underlined the importance of following up and implementing the agreements concluded in the latest meetings of the joint Algerian-Jordanian higher committee, particularly that of exporting Jordanian pharmaceutical products to Algerian markets. The Prime Minister accepted an invitation from his Algerian counterpart to visit Algeria saying, "it is important to upgrade bilateral ties." Dr Majali has recently issued directives setting up a special bureau to cater for patients transferred from Algeria (or any other Arab country) to Jordan, and to facilitate their treatment in public or private hospitals. Algeria has repeatedly expressed its intention of transferring its patients to Jordanian hospitals because of their high quality of health care. Jordan and Algeria on Sunday announced the formation of a joint Jordanian Algerian Business Council, including several private sector corporations in the two countries, sources of the Ministry of Industry and Trade said. The formation of the council aims at enhancing economic and trade relations between the two countries, Minister of Industry and Trade Hani Mulqi said. On his part, Algerian Minister of Industry and Reconstruction hailed the development of relations between Jordan and Algeria, particularly in the field of trade.

Anani meets US Official

AMMAN (Petra)—Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Jawad Anani met on Monday with the UN World Food Program's (WFD) new Representative and Regional Director Bim Odas. The two sides reviewed fields of cooperation, especially in the field of forestation, developing high lands and training agricultural cadres, in addition to the assistance given to production projects designed to be carried out by women. The WFD's annual budget is estimated at $1.5 billion, of which $55 million are spent on foodstuffs and various items of development. Mr Odas said that the WFD will carry out in the near future a JD 200,000 project for bee and poultry breeding in different areas of the country.

Lloyds inspection team in Aqaba under fire

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presence of Lloyds in Aqaba. Foreign Minister Jawad Anani held talks with members of the Security Council to discuss the matter. Also, Minister of Transport Sami Gammoh was quoted as saying "Jordan will no longer pay for the Lloyds Register at Aqaba."

The oil-for-food deal allowed Iraq to import goods via other ports, and today Syria, Turkey, and Dubai export goods to Iraq without the restrictions of inspectors. Consequently criticism in Jordan has become tougher. Renewed protest from industrialists and shipping agents are awaiting decisive measures from the government.

Also suggesting an end to the existence of Lloyds Register at Aqaba is Mr Sufian Al Muhaisen, executive manager of the Shipping Agents Association, who stressed. " the UN-Lloyds goods monitoring and inspection operation has cost Jordan between $2-3 million a year since August 1994."

Mr Muhaisen said that "the presence of Lloyds is no longer justified for many reasons." The peace treaty between Jordan and Israel has enhanced the Kingdom's international credibility as a country that respects and adheres to commitments imposed by international resolutions.

Mr Muhaisen said that the oil-for-food deal has established an inspection point by UN personnel on the Jordanian-Iraqi borders for this reason." In addition this program which allowed other neighboring ports to receive Iraqi imports, gave them a competitive advantage over Aqaba" he continued.

Mr Muhaisen reiterated, "We believe that this inspection be brought to an end, or channel all Iraqi imports allowed by the UN to come via Aqaba and Umm Qaser ports on an equal basis with other ports, and at the same time compensate Jordan financially for what it has paid to the Lloyds Register."

Afi Al Dajani, an expert at the Amman Chamber of Industry, insists that Lloyds' presence at Aqaba is undesirable for many reasons. "First of all, it is an additional financial burden to the country and it is unjustifiable," he said. "It's time that the Jordanian insurance companies were put in charge of the mission as they are globally approved and are highly qualified," he added.■



It could soon be business as usual at Aqaba port

Britain's Millennium Dome: A boon or a boondoggle?

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dence and relative prosperity, the government is planning big millennium celebrations all around the country.

About $6 billion has been earmarked for special projects. As well as the Greenwich extravaganza, they include refurbishing sports stadiums, setting up a national network of cycle routes, building new museums and galleries and constructing a huge greenhouse.

Blair's people are clearly aware that persuading the reluctant people of Britain to love the dome is a key to their own continued political success.

"If the Millennium Dome is a success, it will never be forgotten," said Peter Mandelson, a minister without portfolio who has taken charge of the project. "If it is a failure, we will never be forgiven." ■

LA Times—Washington Post News Service

Larger local councils planned to offset debt problems

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Sometimes municipalities have taken land from people to undertake projects, but these people must be compensated for their land.

Meanwhile, the budget for the municipalities was estimated at JD 89 million last year. In addition to this, the Ministry provided urgent loans to municipalities whose budgets have exceeded JD 2 million. "These sums of money are the first payments from the JD 23 million package that has been allocated for 1998-2000 to develop infrastructure projects in the country," Dr Kasasbeh continued.

"We have signed an agreement with 14 local authorities initially, and we'll choose another 120-150 from the existing councils," Dr Kasasbeh pointed out that their choice depends on several factors: the most important of which is poverty, the rate of unemployment, and the state of the infrastructure in the municipality.

Some of the concepts and values concerning the functions of the municipality need immediate modification. "The municipality is considered to be a charitable society there to employ the biggest number of people," Dr Kasasbeh told *The Star*. "Municipalities are over-employing and consuming up to 80 percent of their budgets this way," he added.

A more important problem is the fact that municipalities do not perform their tasks effectively, especially when collecting dues from local people. "Municipalities have not been able to take any tangible measures to collect the JD 30 million that is due them, which would reinforce the position of their councils," Dr Kasasbeh said.

As a solution to this increasing dilemma, the Planning Directorate of the Ministry has drawn up a comprehensive plan for the northern and southern regions in the Kingdom (the middle region has been left to the Greater Amman Municipality). At the heart of the plan is the biggest council merger in Jordan's history, aiming to reduce the 670 councils to a mere 50.

"All the maps which will be the reference point for these plans are ready, and this will make the administrative details easier," a well informed source told *The Star*. "This merger will provide better opportunities for investment, and hopefully lead to fewer problems for the municipalities," the source continued. ■

Cleaning up the environment





Mansar

AMMAN (Star)—Minister of Social Development Mohammad Kheir Mamsar joined 350 orphans in a clean up campign that started from 7th Circle in Jabal Amman and went all the way to the Airport Bridge.

The is part of a wide campign that is concerned with preserving the environment. The activity was organized by the office of the Kuwaiti Social Reform Society which is based in Amman, in cooperation with the Ministries of Social Development, and of Agriculture.

The purpose of Tuesday's activity was created development development and service projects and to create better understanding between Jordanians and Kuwaitis. Dr Mamsar said this type of activity helps to protect nature and the environment.

Get run over walk on roads!

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number of road accidents. But is this likely to happen?

City planners should also implement a full scale action plan to get people back into the habit of walking safely on pavements. Listening to citizen's remarks would be a good start. For example, a common complaint is that pavements are too high—"It would take less effort to climb Everest than to step onto one of our pavements."

So, how about it, city planners? Lets have olive tree-free pavements that do not require the aid of an oxygen tank to mount!■

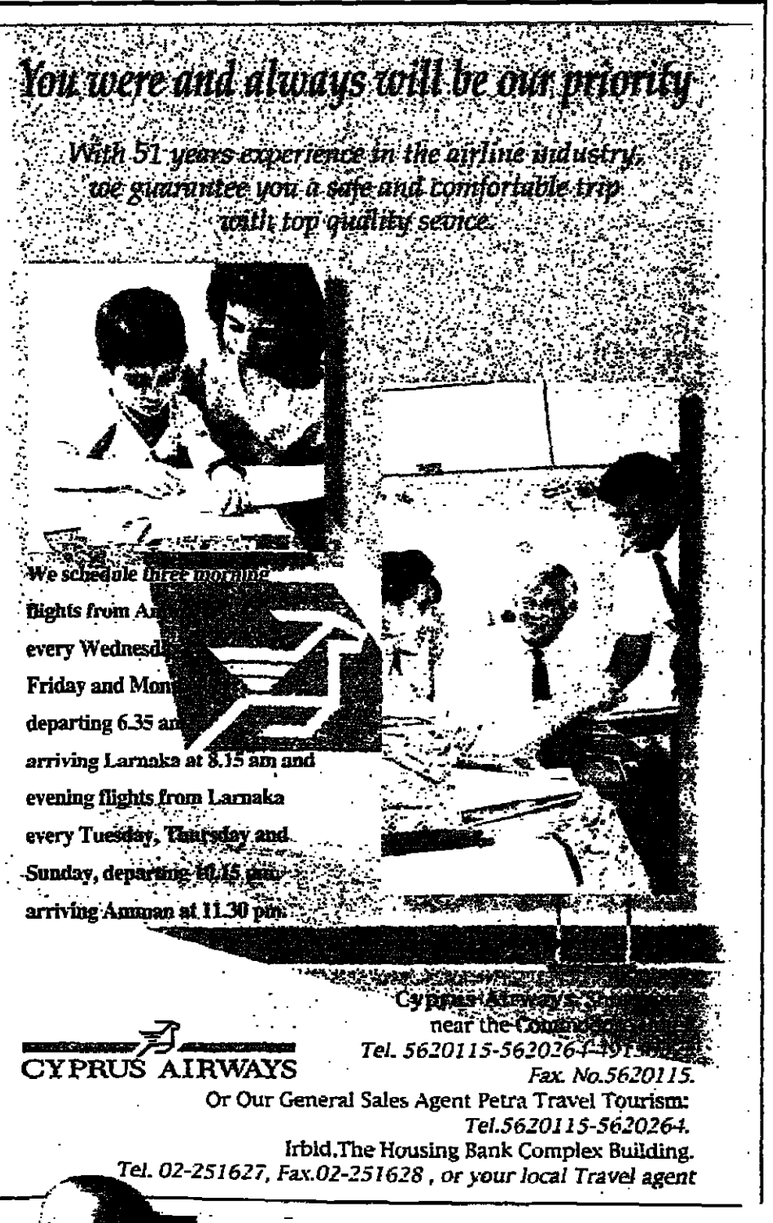
Israeli President shows discontent with Peace stalemate

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ing and immoral."

The debate at the Security Council was instigated by Arab calls to condemn Israel's decision to extend municipal services from Jerusalem to Jewish settlements in the West Bank. The United States earlier objected to such a debate which it argued would not be helpful to reviving the peace process. ■

LA Times-Washington Post News Service



THE STAR ONLINE
http://star.arabia.com

JORDAN WEEK



An unconventional report on Jordanian news and views edited by Marwan Al Asmar

Elections

■ There is just one more day before the elections of the press body start, Friday. Things remains quiet, which may indicate that the process will go smoothly. Contesting the presidency are Seif El Sharif, Khaled Mahadin and Basim Sakejha. Standing for membership of the Council of Newspaper Owners are Fakhri Abu Hamdah, Zuhdi Al Badri, and Nidal Mansour. Editorial candidates who don't own newspapers include Nabeel Gheishan, Tareq Al Moumani, Jamal Al Alawi, Jamal Al Shawaheen, Mohammed Khatatbeh, Dina Zurba and Ali Odeibat.

Health front

■ A couple of things are happening on the public health front— no, not strikes or industrial action. A new JD 40 million public hospital is to be established at Tabrbour in Amman by the end of the year. The 400-bed Prince Hamza Hospital is supposed to parallel the Al Bashir Hospital in size. On another front, a new Ministry of Health run center for addicts is to be opened in Shaffa Badran this coming August. The center, which has 50 beds is the first of its kind in the Kingdom.

Hello

■ Three cheers for the Jordan Telecommunication Co. The JTC is slashing the prices of international calls by a massive 30 percent. What's more, this becomes effective from 1 July. International calls account for 70 percent of the JTC's revenue, but officials point out that they hope that this step will encourage more people to make more international calls. On the other hand, and to offset some of the losses the JTC have decided to increase the cost of local calls by 1 fils per minute, and by lowering the number of 'free minutes' to 3200 per year.

Violations

■ There were 3611 violations in 1997 according to a report released by the Observation and Administrative Control Bureau. The report stated that 3000 of these violations which took place in ministeries, government departments, and public corporations, have been rectified. A total of 331 committees were set up by the Bureau to look into the workings of government throughout the Kingdom.

Tawjihi

■ All quiet on the Tawjhi front. While this maybe true, some students still feel that the exams this year, especially for Physics and Chemistry,were particularly hard. Some have even sent complaints to the Ministry of Education, but it is hard to see what they can do. However, the students hope that the examiners will take into account the fact that the examinations for these subjects were tough.

Media polls

■ The latest opinion poll from the Center of Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan yet again reveals some interesting figures. Only about 40 percent of those polled said they read daily newspapers. This is a marked improvement on the 1997 figures of 34.2 percent, but the figure for 1996 was 52.3 percent. Marked swings in the three years, however for 1998—59.6 percent of those polled said they don't read daily newspapers, down from 65.8 percent in 1997 and 47.7 percent in 1996. Of those that do read, 13.8 percent only read certain columns. In the case of weeklies, the situation is different again. Only 18.3 percent said they read weekly newspapers, and 2.9 percent only read preferred columns. As expected, 95 percent of those polled owned a television, while only 12.2 percent have a satellite dish. However, only 46.1 percent said that they watched Jordan Television, 19.2 percent watch Syrian TV and only 4.59 percent watch Israeli television.

Post-graduate studies

■ Anybody wishing to persue post-graduate studies at the University of Jordan can apply between 4 and 15 July. At present 16 doctoral and 57 Masters programs in different disciplines are being offered. You can get a PhD in Arabic, English, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Geology, Sharia, Agriculture and Engineering. People wishing to apply should contact the different colleges at the university. The same applies to students wishing to pursue a Masters degree, which are offered in almost every subject taught at the university.

Construction

■ The construction sector could be flagging. More than 120 engineering offices have closed down this year according to newspaper reports. Government tenders have dropped from JD 11, 900,000 in 1985 to just under JD 2,58,000 in 1997.

Tariff relief

■ The Director-General of the Customs Dept., Nathmi Abdallah, clarified the decision of the Council of Ministers handicapped people will be exempt from car tariffs. But he stressed that this exemption will only apply to those who are paralyzed in one or both of the lower limbs of the body. He said that those who have paralysis in the upper parts won't be entitled to full relief.

No new posts

■ The Ministry of Social Development won't be hiring any new people in 1998. A source said the Ministry will cut its employees by two percent. However the reduction is to be made by offering early retirement.

Prince calls for respect of human rights

AMMAN (Petra)—At a Regional workshop on Civic Education this week, His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan called for the development of dialogue which respects the viewpoint of others, highlighting the importance of the 50th anniversary of Human Rights Declaration.

"We meet here today to magnify commonalities, and respect differences, and to speak about the absolute respect of human dignity despite differences of opinion."

"Pluralism is a force in democracy and institutionalization and sovereignity of law," Prince Hassan added. Prince Hassan also touched on the OIC's recent summit in Tehran, which approved the idea of talking about civic society and the place of Islamic values within it.

The Crown Prince stressed the necessity of developing dialogue with other civilizations, outwith the inter-Arab framework, but stressed that this region must be considered a connected economic and political entity.

The Crown Prince added that the time had come to argue against misguided notions of the Arab Islamic civilization, and to resist the trend of only taking western values seriously, as though the Arab Islamic civilization's contribution does not exist.

Prince Hassan stressed the role of non-governmental organizations and civic society institutions in releasing an Arab initiative that addresses the world and spreads the real picture of the Arab Islamic civilization through dialogue.

Finally, the Crown Prince pointed out that the responsibility for disputing discrimination against Arabs at this stage lies with Arabs themsleves, due to the absence of any wider initatives to challenge the status quo.■



Labor workshop prepares for unemployment conference

AMMAN (Star)—The Labor Unions Federation held a three-day seminar titled "Role of Labor Unions in Combating Unemployment, the Search for a National Strategy to Job Opportunities and Social Justice". This workshop is preparing final recommendations for the coming National Conference to fight unemployment which the Ministry of Administrative Development is holding in August.

"The seminar is proposing ideas to be presented to the coming conference" said Mr Boyko Atanassov, office director in the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU).

"Since our organization has 125 million members from labor establishments in the world, organizing educational seminars is essential." The office director pointed out that unemployment figures in the world is in excess of 700 million, while in Jordan no specific statistics were confirmed.

Speakers at the seminar tackled the issue of employment from different angles, social partnership and employment policies, and the role of labor legislation in decreasing unemployment.

Fathallah Imrani, vice president of the LUF talked about social security and it's role in protecting the unemployed. "We do not have a so-called terme 'shame culture', but we suffer from high foreign labor." Imrani explained that more than 500,000 expartriates send their money out of the country, which means great economic loss to Jordan.■

Emigration

Is the grass really always greener?

By Ghassan Joha
Special to The Star

A Lebanese poet once said:
O, may I lose my lofty dream
forsaken, in Humanity
But no, for simple self-esteem
is woven with Loyalty!

CHOOSING a way of life for yourself and making a success of it is everybody's dream. Sometimes, people leave one way of life because of powers beyond their control—they are forced to emigrate and start anew in a foreign land. More often these days, however, young people choose to change their destiny by beginning a new life in the West. With little idea what lies ahead, but with many preconceived ideas about their chosen destination that sometimes bare little resemblance to reality, they set out full of hope. Few are less than idealistic.

Jouni Abu Zaghibra (Abu Samer) didn't plan for a long stay in the United States when he left Amman 11 years ago. Neither the American style of living nor money convinced him to leave— sheer ambition influenced his decision. "Ever since I set foot in the US, my mind was fixed on an objective—to go for my dream and to live the adventure," the 40-year-old Abu Samer explained. His adventure began with a visit but soon became his life. He admits it wasn't easy to switch to a new life, having to find a job and a place to live, but after making contact with relatives, he eventually settled down.

"At first I shared an apartment with three others for four months," said Abu Samer. He began work in a wholesale store averaging $1600 a month, considering himself lucky. "I knew some who came to the States on a whim and day by day they found that it was a big mistake—they were caught in trap with no way out, since they don't have money and are ashamed to tell their relatives back home," he added.

He pointed out that despite having a job and a house, "you're still seen as a foreigner, so you must be thrifty and hold on to your money just in case you want to return home."

Abu Samer's life wasn't fruitful at first, but it improved when he met and fell in love with Leslie, a cheerful American lady in her mid-30s. The couple married in San Francisco just months after Abu Samer's arrival in the city in 1987.

"We first met casually. It was a moment I will never forget," Mrs Abu-Zaghibra told *The Star* recently on a short visit to Jordan with her husband. Their marriage was a turning point. "Before the wedding, my family and friends kept urging me to rethink, mainly because of the harsh negative views in the media about Arabs," Mrs Abu-Zaghibra adds. They criticized her again when she allowed Abu Samer to take their small daughter with him on a visit to Jordan in 1993, again a sign of prevailing prejudice in the west—that Arab men are untrustworthy and will kidnap their children and abandon their western wives.

Mrs Abu-Zaghibra turned a blind eye to their warnings. "It seemed like a matter of trust and honesty", she said. The only definite voice that Mrs Abu-Zaghibra heard came from her heart. As for Abu Samer, the family has always been his foremost priority.

Both Jouni and his wife are now running their own business and share child-minding their two young daughters and three-year-old son. They are fairly traditional in the way they are bring up their children. Regarding her duties towards the kids, Mrs Abu-Zaghibra initially gave up work. "I gave up management of the electronics section in my company for one year, due to the burden I was under," she said. However, she is now back at work as the circumstances are better. "We are very lucky to have each other. Our family is very close and so strong. Jouni and the kids are my life and that really matters to me," Mrs Abu-Zaghibra said.

Little did Abu Samer know that a family trip to Jordan last year would again change the direction of their lives. Mrs Abu-Zaghibra enthused, "We were all so impressed by the stable conditions in Jordan, unlike in the States," said Mrs Abu-Zaghibra. "When I go out shopping in San Francisco with my kids, I must watch them all the time, but here they can go and play together peacefully."

This trip made such an impact on them both that the family are now planning to return to Jordan for good. They are constructing a house in one of west Amman's neighborhoods and are looking forward to their 'new life'.

It is now Mrs Abu-Zaghibra's chance to experience the hopes and dreams that emigration to a new homeland inspire. Unlike Abu Samer, who arrived in the US alone and facing the unknown, she already knows a great deal about where she is going and has the firm support of a close family. When the kids excitedly ask when they will be moving, she tells them "sometime next year," without the slightest sign of anxiousness about the prejudices or problems she may face as a foreigner. Nothing, it seems, can diminish the powerful human belief that "the grass is always greener on the other side."■



● *Haj Abed Al Karim Salim is an old timer from Jerash. He has long been toiling the land, and hopes to continue for many years to come. He has seen many changes through the years, and says life today is a great deal more complicated than it was in his youth.*

Abbadi's statements anger Lower House

By Star Staff Writer

THE OUTRAGE caused by the recent statements from the Lower House Deputy Ahmad Oweidi Al Abbadi, is continuing to escalate, as lawyers and deputies consider the option of legal action against him.

Abbadi was quoted as saying, "talk of national unity is a lie," during an interview on the Jazeerah Satellite Channel in Qatar. In the interview, the Deputy uttered many statements considered to be harmful to national unity by claiming that the Palestinians only received Jordanian nationality for humanitarian reasons.

Well-known writer and columnist Oraib Rintawi, who was also present at the interview, asked the program's commentator to stop the show because of Abbadi's statements.

However, Abbadi's stance is not a new one. He has been severly criticized for inciting sectarian conflict between Jordanians and Palestinians before, although this has never deterred him from making inflammatory remarks. Abbadi has been taken to court in the past, but he was acquitted on all charges, and and he continued to campaign on the same issue during the elections last year. The Security Forces removed a lot of his banners during the election campaign, following protests that they would incite national division.

Nowadays, Abbadi is being increasingly isolated by many political activists, groups, lawyers and even colleagues from the Lower House. There is a general consensus that Abbadi's parliamentary immunity should be withdrawn, and that he should be taken to court again.

His Majesty The King has repeatedly said that anyone who tampers with national unity should be viewed as an enemy of the state.

Some deputies have taken up this call, reacting strongly to Abbadi's statements and withdrawing from sessions attended by him.

A group of deputies comprising Mohammed Al Kouz, Mohammed Abu Hudeib and Hamadah Faraneh have also called for the removal of Abbadi's parliamentary immunity and for new trial proceedings to be brought against him.

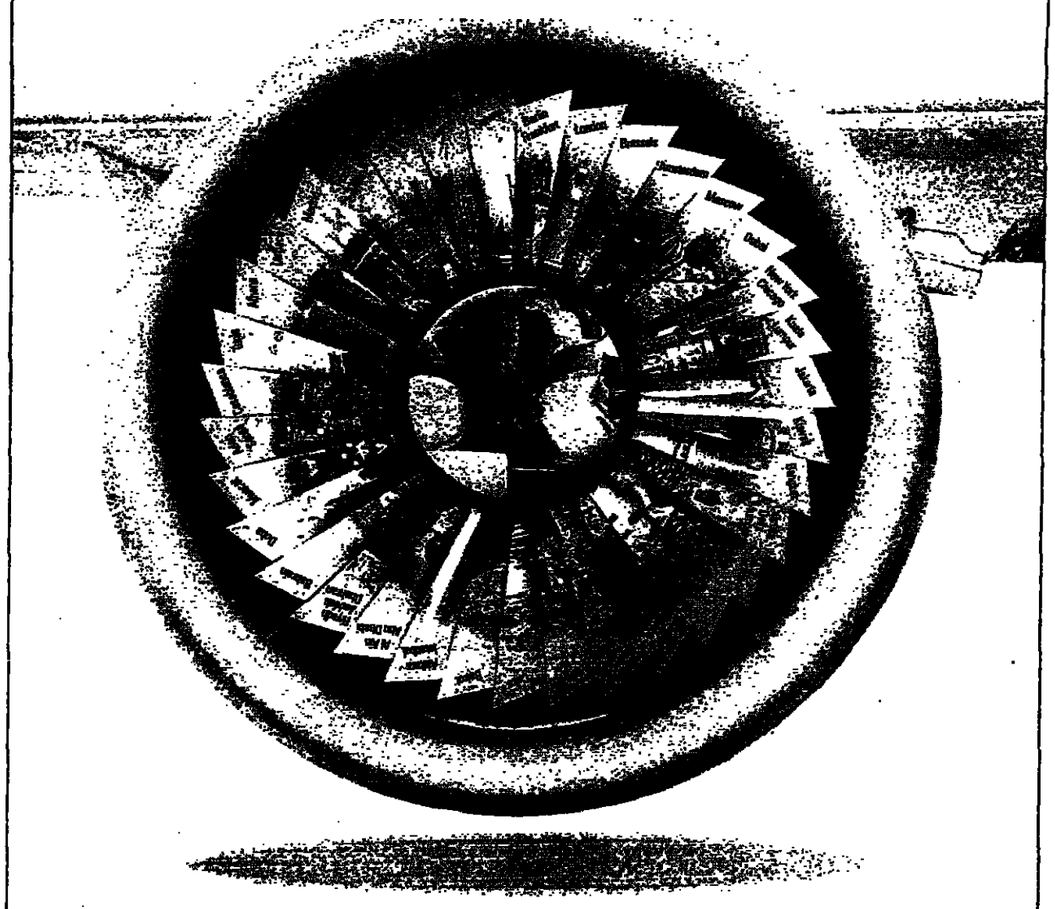
Senator Abdullatif Arabiyat shares this belief, as he views anyone who attempts to divide Jordanian society and incite sectarian strife to be "devilish." However, some parliamentary sources say they are unable to remove Abbadi's immunity during this extraordinary session, as it would require rescheduling the parliamentary agenda.

Deputy Nazih Ammarin told *The Star*, "Those who know Abbadi and are aware of his political stance, shouldn't be astonished to hear his recent statements on the TV." Ammarin stressed that national unity should be sacred, "and that anyone who tampers with it should face legal action, as such a stance will only serve the Zionist interest."

Ammarin confirmed that these statements would not affect national unity, because "many Jordanian families have deep ties with the West Bank, and everyone knows Abbadi's statements are extreme."

The picture should become clearer over the next few days. Lower House Speaker Saad Hayel Srour, said that the possibility of removing Abbadi's parliamentary immunity should be left to the judicial system. The House is expected to issue a statement on the matter shortly. ■

Hospitality, hub to hub.



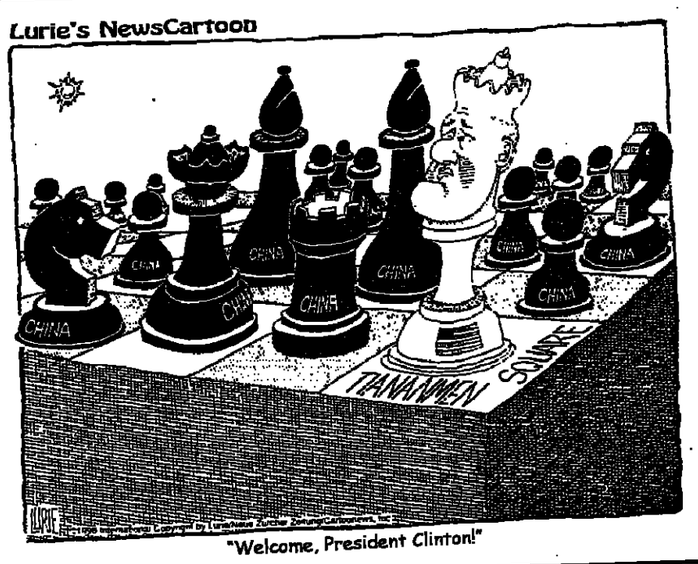
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ROYAL JORDANIAN الملكية الأردنية

Reflecting the Change.

Lurie's NewsCartoon



"Welcome, President Clinton!"

Our Say. . .

A thaw in relations with Kuwait

THE VISIT this week by Minister of Planning Dr Rema Khalaf to Kuwait is the first by a senior Jordanian official since the Gulf War. It represents a positive change and signals, hopefully, a thaw that could lead to full normalization of diplomatic relations between the two Arab countries.

Both Jordan and Kuwait have suffered in various ways, as a result of the Gulf War and Iraq's occupation in 1990. While the Kuwaitis felt the brunt of the Iraqi seizure of their country, Jordan was caught in the line of fire for calling for an Arab solution to the crisis. The Jordanian position, which at no stage supported the Iraqi occupation, was unjustly misinterpreted leading to a fall-out between Jordan and Kuwait.

Efforts by His Majesty King Hussein, Crown Prince Hassan and senior Jordanian officials to rectify the situation and exonerate Jordan, were met by a sense of defiance by some in Kuwait who refused to close this chapter of the Gulf War and to mend relations with their Arab brethren.

But almost eight years after the debacle, the time has come to move on. As we approach the 21st century, the Arabs find themselves on a collision course resulting from the enormous regional challenges; the solutions to which can only be addressed collectively. The Kuwaitis too must realize that only by reconciliation will the deep divisions created by the Iraqi occupation be overcome.

Jordan has always been keen on collective Arab action based on mutual respect and a shared vision. It's policies and positions within the Arab ranks, throughout history, testify to this. As a country who has an important role to play in regional stability and development, Jordan looks to its neighbors and friends for support, moral and otherwise.

Kuwait has always been a friend to Jordan and Jordanians will never forget Kuwait's backing of Jordan in the years of struggle.

This is an opportunity to move forward and set an example, as reconciliation serves the interests of the people and the region as a whole. While the political realities, created by Iraq's occupation of Kuwait, continue to haunt the Arabs, a Jordanian-Kuwaiti rapprochement should pave the way for an eventual recovery of Arab coordination on such issues as the peace process, and the rehabilitation of Iraq once it fulfills its obligations under UN and Arab League resolutions. The latter includes the recognition of Kuwait's territorial integrity as well as the repatriation of the unaccounted Kuwaitis.

We look with optimism at the visit of Dr Khalaf and hope that it will pave the way for a swift and concrete restoration of normal relations between the two countries.■

Spell Israel s future: S-H-A-R-I-N-G

By Daoud Kuttab

OCCUPIED EAST Jerusalem—More than 30 years ago, the Israeli army conquered Palestinian and Arab lands in a war they have repeatedly insisted was a defensive war. Israeli leaders had always stated that they were ready for peace with their Arab neighbors and would give up territory for peace. Israel's defense minister at the time, Moshe Dayan, repeatedly said that he was waiting for a phone call from the leaders of the surrounding Arab countries.

Today, Arab leaders have not only phoned but have met, negotiated and even signed declarations of principles and peace agreements. But most of the Arab lands continue to be controlled and occupied by Israel. Nowhere is this absolute Israeli control over Arab land more evident than in East Jerusalem. Defying the United Nations and the world community, Israel has illegally annexed the Arab city to Israel and has systematically worked on depopulating East Jerusalem of Palestinians.

This has been done through unilateral actions as well as continuous governmental and private support for Jewish settlement activities. Since 1967, Israel has expanded the borders of the city to include as much Arab land and as few Palestinians as possible.

The 1970s and 1980s witnessed a major push to increase the Jewish population on Arab lands while denying Palestinians natural growth, housing expansion and economic development. In the 1990s, the Israeli government added to the discrimination in housing by initiating a slow transfer policy and denying residency rights to Jerusalem's Palestinians by various administrative acts.

The Palestinian economy was further shattered by a policy that denied Palestinians from outside Jerusalem the freedom to travel into or through the city.

Despite all these measures against the Palestinian Arabs of Jerusalem, the Oslo accords promised a reprieve. In the Declaration of Principles signed in Washington on 13 September 1993, the state of Israel accepted that the issue of Jerusalem is negotiable and proposed that its status be discussed during the permanent status talks. This Israel-PLO agreement also called on both parties not to carry out unilateral actions that would threaten to adversely affect the result of the negotiations. But the Israelis never honored that agreement.

In 1997, the Israelis broke ground on a Palestinian hilltop in East Jerusalem, Jabal Abu Ghneim, to make room for 6,500 apartments exclusively for Jews. The act caused the breakoff of negotiations with the Palestinians.

Now, on the eve of a possibly US-sponsored breakthrough, the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu once again is flouting Palestinian rights, signed agreements and world opinion by expanding the borders of the city to affect the demographic balance of Jerusalem.

For years, Palestinians knew that Israel had a secret directive to keep the Palestinian population in Jerusalem under 28 percent. This week, the Israeli government publicly announced this racist policy. Speaking to the press, Netanyahu and Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert said the expansion of the city is aimed at keeping the Palestinian population under 30 percent.

Netanyahu can claim that this recent decision has no political connotation. He might even think he can fool the world with his paternalistic attitude, saying that the aim of this new plan is to provide better municipal service to Jews and Arabs. But no one is fooled.

Most Palestinians are not allowed to enter Jerusalem today. In the past couple of years, hundreds have lost their birthright to live in the city. Those who dared to defy discriminatory housing policies by building on their own land have found their homes turned to rubble. Israeli actions are causing the most basic principle of the peace process—land for peace—to become worthless. Jerusalem is a holy city to Jews, Christians and Muslims. The path forward for the city is not for one side to retain exclusive control and bully the other parties. The answer to the future of Jerusalem is spelled s-h-a-r-i-n-g.

Kuttab is the director of the Institute of Modern Media at Al Quds University in Jerusalem. ■

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LA Times-Washington Post News Service



An everyday scene: Palestinians clash with Israeli soldiers in Jerusalem

The forgotten famine in Sudan

By Tony P. Hall

WASHINGTON—A decade ago, the world witnessed the first televised famine, when Ethiopians began by the tens of thousands. Who will ever forget the sight of walking skeletons, of village children whose swollen bellies made them look pregnant, of babies dying at their mother's breasts? Since then, the world has seen a lot of suffering, but we still judge hunger against the depths of Ethiopians' hell.

Now, in a neighboring country, another famine threatens to cut as deeply. Nearly 2 million people already have died during Sudan's famine and the 15 years of fighting that keeps conditions at a crisis level. Hundreds of human beings continue to be captured and sold into slavery each month. And yet the world has muffled both its outrage and its compassion.

When the humanitarian lifeline to southern citizens in Sudan was cut, few Americans heard of the abominable action. When the blockade finally was lifted, after leaving hundreds of thousands of people weak and emaciated, many who do track developments in Africa mentally checked Sudan off their list of worries.

But the famine is far from over—and a new round of slave raids has compounded its victims' suffering. Armed men on horse and camelback are seizing and selling hundreds of people into slavery in a scorched-earth campaign against parts of southern Sudan. Those who have escaped have been driven into hiding in swamps that are home to malarial mosquitoes and almost barren of food or shelter. Their meager possessions—their livestock and the tools they need for farming—have been torched by the marauders. Still there is little awareness of these atrocities.

The people of southern Sudan are in a sinking ship, and their attackers are firing into the hull. It is a development no country that considers itself humane can stand by and watch. And yet, even in that most elementary way the world helps—by sending food and humanitarian aid—it has let 80 percent of the United Nations appeal on behalf of Sudan's victims go unfilled.

In a three-day visit to the famine-stricken area this month, I witnessed hundreds of Sudanese struggling against impossible odds to survive. In the swamps they've been driven into, people are roasting the roots of water lilies in their desperation for something to eat. In the "killing fields," where marauders recently burned homes and emptied villages, vultures are picking clean the bones of people and cattle alike. It is a sickening sight.



Young children are often the first victims of famine

At aid workers' feeding centers, I saw hundreds more people. Many had lost their families before they arrived; one emaciated man had watched his wife and three children die one by one on the four-day walk to safety. Most of the children were eerily silent, too weak to lift their heads or even cry. One tiny infant reached out to grab hold of my finger with fingers that were little thicker than twigs.

For now, the attacks and the people's weak condition means that Sudan's fertile fields aren't being planted, and so there will be no food next year either—fields that could be the breadbasket for one-quarter of Africa but that instead are being cleared of their farmers and herders.

The crisis deepens with each passing week. Its victims are destitute and abandoned, their lives slipping away to the indifference of a world that hasn't seen terror like this in years.

Most of all, the people of southern Sudan need food—and enough of it so they don't consume what little seed is left. To see the people who run on spindly legs to get the sacks of food delivered by air drop is heart-wrenching. So little to those who send it, it is life itself to these desperate people.

But the Sudanese need far more than food, and seeds and tools to replace what was lost in the slave raids. Most of all, they need peace.

If the United States is sorry for doing too little to stop Rwanda's atrocities, we should act now to stop Sudan's. People of every nation owe their moral outrage, backed up by action, against this barbarity. ■

LA Times-Washington Post News Service



A Serbian policeman stands guard outside a mosque in the village of Ade in Kosovo, Wednesday. Serb forces, Tuesday, had recaptured the coal mine near the village, from ethnic Albanian separatists and repelled an attack along the Albanian border, killing eight fighters. Control of the mine would help the Serbs resupply the Obilic power plant which produces electricity for Kosovo.

AFP photo

Middle East Beat
by Khairi Janbek

Expanded Jerusalem

THE UNITED Nations has resolutions governing the status of the city of Jerusalem, as part of the Arab occupied territories. Therefore, any alteration to the status quo of the city is not acceptable, even by the standards of the PNA-Israeli negotiations. Expanding the boundaries of the city is obviously to the advantage of the Israelis, and the predictable demographic and geographic alterations are likely to reduce the Arab population of the city into an even smaller minority, justifying Israeli claims to the whole of Jerusalem. The Americans, as partners in the peace process, have indicated their understanding of the Israeli plans regarding Jerusalem, but not the sensitivities of the Arab and Islamic worlds. It advisable that some sort of unified position be made among the Arab States, in coordination with the PNA, before taking this matter to the United Nations. In addition, the Islamic States should also have a role to play, as the Muslim Holy Shrines are neither linguistically, nor ethnically biased. Perhaps such proposed coordination may revive the much neglected contacts between Arab and non-Arab Islamic States.

If the question of Jerusalem is debated at the UN and the American veto is applied, Arabs and Muslims may as well resign themselves to watching the whole affair slip between their fingers. What can they do under these circumstances, and what can Jordan do, when their Arab brethren were reluctant even to acknowledge the Hashemite role in preserving the sanctity of the Holiest of the Holies? Moving the Committee to Save Jerusalem from the Middle East to the shores of the Atlantic was a wise move as it internationalized the Jerusalem affair. It is also obvious that a new level of Arab and Islamic coordination is required—coordination that is born out of reality which is relevant to the current circumstances; one which is devoid of slogans and empty political promises.

We can only move forward by eliminating the ill-will that exists among the Arab states, and working together over Jerusalem may prove to be the binding factor, whether within the context of an Arab Summit or a re-vamped Arab League. If there is no acknowledgment given to deserving parties and no will to work in a collective manner, then the Arab world will continue only to give this problem lip-service as a way of alleviating guilt. Countries that do make tough choices, and put their international and regional relations in jeopardy, however, should—at least—receive help and much needed support from a collective Arab and Islamic world.

Perhaps this time, if there is a real Arab and Islamic will to take a unified stand against the Israeli plans, the agenda should make role identification a priority in order to avoid the usual accusations and recriminations that habitually plague inter-Arab relations. ■

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Business scene

■ Jordan is expected to receive a $10 million financial aid to carry out 30 projects within the framework of the scheduled international program to protect the ozone layer. Minister of the Municipal, Rural and Environment Affairs, Tawfiq Kreishan, said that the Montreal Committee for the Protection of the Ozone allocated $2 million to finance Jordanian projects and help carry out these enterprises.

■ Overall assets at the Central Bank of Jordan (CBJ) reached JD 3.557 million by the end of last May. Official figures showed that the CBJ's assets of gold were JD 243.6 million and that the special drawing rights stood at JD 509,000. Convertible foreign currency stood at JD1.379 billion including monetary deposits and JD108.6 million bonds. CBJ's assets of domestic currency totalled JD 1.43 billion. As for current accounts and convertible currencies, they reached JD 454.5 million.

■ Pre-tax profits generated by the Bank of Jordan were last year about 2.911 million compared with JD 6.5 million in 1996. The Bank's balance sheet showed that its net interests and commissions generated by all branches stood at JD 19.7 million. Shareholders' rights recorded a rise of about JD 4.47 million to reach JD 33.58 million, due to an increase in the bank's capital.

■ The Islamic Bank of Jordan opened its 42nd branch in west Amman this week. More branches will open this year, and the bank is currently being modernized. Chairman of the Board, Mahmoud Hassoubah, said the bank will sail through the so-called 'Year 2000 problem' because of its modern computerized eqipment.

■ The Amman Financial Market is in a boyant mood this week. The financial indicator is hovering around 172 points having jumped from 169 points. Industrial companies are leading the upward swing.

Foreign Exchange
Wednesday, 1 JULY

	Buy JD	Sell JD
US $	0.7080	0.7100
£	1.1510	1.1568
DM	0.4124	0.4145
SFr	0.4801	0.4825
FRF	0.1227	0.1233
YEN (100)	0.5624	0.5652
DFL	0.3667	0.3685
LIT (100)	0.0419	0.0421

Jordan s solar-powered tourist industry

By Ilham Sadeq
Star Staff Writer


Zaman



THE GLOBAL tendency towards the utilization of renewed energy resources continues to get much attention, amid fears that current energy sources face depletion. Consequently there is a never-ending quest for cheaper and safer methods of preserving the environment whilst meeting industrial goals.

Governments realize the need for solar energy in many fields. This resource, which requires no complicated equipment for exploitation, has become a multi-purpose power source and is commonly used in houses, factories and tourist sites everywhere.

The Star recently talked with a scientist who specializes in solar energy, and whose company is in charge of various solar energy projects in Jordan. Waheed Zaman, from Azerbaijan, is the owner of Electrical Consulting Engineers GMBH (ECE). He told *The Star* about the technique of converting solar energy into a dynamic power that can benefit many fields, and about the kinds of projects his company has carried out so far in Jordan.

"We were invited last year to Jordan by the Community for the Med-partenariat Conference where we met several Jordanian firms," Dr Zaman stated. Already ECE has cooperated with the Jordanian economic and social organization for retired officers, headed by Gen. Salem Al Turk, by providing it with energy saving solar tents. The company has made several design studies of hospitals and hotels utilizing our own new technology," he elaborated.

For instance, there is the Wadi Saqra Hospital project, which saves around JD2.5 million worth of energy, and Amra Hotel, which saves around JD 3 million. In addition, the company carries out various projects in Amman such as providing buildings with passive solar heating and mechanical systems, project design and supervision including the supply of equipment. ECE also provides passive solar heating, and designs and tenders documents for the Royal Scientific Society.

Dr Zaman explained that as part of a large tourism related project, 100 solar-powered tents, each 4x4x3m will be installed at sites at the Dead Sea, Tafila and Aqaba.

All tents will be furnished to three star hotel standard, and cost around JD 20 per day. Toilets and wash basins for European tourists will be situated in a building near the tent.

For Jordanian visitors there will be 100 similarly sized tents, but without furniture, at a daily rate of around JD 10. Each site has ten drinking water tents to hold drinking water cooling tanks. In addition, ten tents holding refrigerators will be on site to cool soft drinks for European tourists, and five ajoining 8x8m tents will serve meals to guests. Service buildings will accommodate cooking, laundry, and other services.

Solar energy PV systems will be used for lighting, by charging batteries at a central station. The batteries, which sit outstide the tents, will power the lighting.

Hot water production with solar collectors will be installed in the buildings, which will power the swimming pool for tourists at the Dead Sea site.

Tafila will have four treatment pools—two for male and female Muslims and two for Europeans. A 8x8m tent for prayer will also be provided

With more than 22 years experience, ECE in West Asia is synonymous with the highest standards of engineering constancy. Its successful projects are valued at nearly one and a half billion deutschmarks, and range from power to irrigation, water treatment and building services. Foreign clients include air-conditioning, illumination, electro-mechanical works and building automation suppliers.

Dr Zaman, who is a Muslim holding German nationality, explained the basic technology which is the basis of the solar system.

"It is necessary to realize that this technique is based on one fact—there are two sites, one for sunrise and one for sunset, and they charge according to the season, if winter or summer," Dr Zaman explained. Scientists discovered this about 15 years ago.

Dr Zaman added that special batteries can be installed to absorb the sun's x-rays and convert them to low cost energy. Shading devices (photo voltaic modules) prevent the sun's rays from penetrating windows in summe, reducing the cost of running air-conditioning.

ECE's solar power system was experimental in Rum village in Jordan, and it proved to have no hazardous effects on the environment. Rather, it helped reduce the rate of pollution in the air and could be utilized by everyone because it is so affordable.

During his visit to the Kingdom, Dr Zaman met many senior officials and expressed his readiness to cooperate with any energy-related projects in Jordan.■

Business Chronicle

Shame culture

THE CATCH phrase these days is shame culture. The labor market has been stigmatized by this concept—the view that Jordanians tend to stay away from manual work because it is considered socially demeaning. This social stigma is believed to account for the present unemployment level of 13 percent.

However, to reduce the unemployment problem to one single social factor is to simplify a complex issue, when economic factors, short and long-term planning, as well as political will on the part of policy-makers clearly play a part.

It is no good to keep blaming society. Media hype about Jordanians shunning manual work should be stopped. It does nothing to help find a solution. Inherent is the view that Jordanians aren't productive, and can't do anything beyond having a sedentary occupation. This is a totally wrong perception, as, on the contrary, the forebearers of today's young Jordanians believed in hardwork and productivity.

Why should young Jordanians be any different from their predecessors? "Social stigma" is used again and again as the reason for today's unemployment problem., but the reality lies elsewhere.

One of the prime factors why Jordanians don't go for manual work is because of the pay—it simply doesn't pay enough to sustain them. That's why these jobs are currently filled by a mainly expatriate labor force such as Egyptians who come to Jordan solely to work hard, save and go home.

For Jordanians, the situation is different. Plainly they can't live ten to a room with families. Sheer financial logic has far more to do with today's society turning away from manual labor than anything else. In addition, there is the role of the government. By guaranteeing work to people in the public sector, it has succeeded in creating a sedentary salaried class who prefer to sit (often idly) in front of a desk rather than go out and find more productive work.

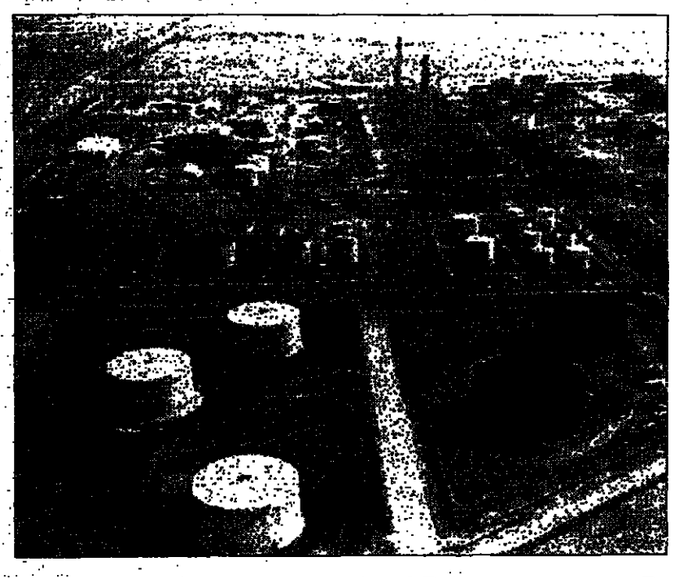
The government has at long last come to realize that they have an inflated bureaucracy that has got to be trimmed down. But this may be too late, because the salaried class has long become sedentrized. What is needed is gradual, orderly trimming down, where the government would actively placing these people into more productive projects—that would mean more expenditure, something which may go against the IMF restructuring program that Jordan is undergoing.■

OPEC to reduce oil output

By William Drozdiak

VIENNA—OPEC agreed Wednesday to slash output for the second time in three months in an attempt to stem a tail a world oil glut that has sent prices plunging to the lowest levels in more than a decade.

In a compromise that delegates say was hammered out between rival OPEC powers Saudi Arabia and Iran, the cartel's 11 member nations agreed to cut production by roughly 1.38 million barrels per day. It was the cartel's second round of production cuts since March that, if successful, would meet the goals of most OPEC producers who want to remove at least 2.5 million barrels of oil a day from the saturated global market and put upward pressure on the price of oil.



But there were serious doubts whether OPEC members, whose manipulation of the market sent oil prices soaring and provoked a worldwide recession a quarter-century ago, can exercise that kind of clout Wednesday.

In recent years, OPEC's influence has diminished dramatically as oil-producing countries outside the cartel such as Russia and Norway pumped greater amounts of oil. Consumer nations in North America and Europe haven been using less energy thanks to mild winters and conservation measures.

In addition, Asia's economic crisis has greatly reduced demand in what was once the world's fastest-growing oil market. The first wave of turmoil inAsia struck late last year, just when the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries decided to boost its output—a decision that only accelerated the collapse in oil prices.

After reaching $23 a barrel last October, crude oil prices plummeted last week to below $12. Many oil analysts are skeptical that Wednesday's action will push prices higher given the social and economic pressures that compel many OPEC states to cheat on their quotas to boost their income. Iran, Iraq and non-member Russia are desperate to pump as much oil as they can to surmount economic problems that threaten social and political stability. While Iraq is supposedly restricted by United Nations sanctions to oil-for-food sales, US and European officials acknowledge that Baghdad has been circumventing the sanctions by smuggling substantial amounts of oil through Turkey.

While Russia and Iran are eager to sell much more oil, they have reluctantly further surge in their output would send prices crashing below the threshold of $10 a barrel.

Iran, which is now pumping about 3.8 million barrels a day, agreed Wednesday to cut back to 3.6 million but only after Saudi Arabia approved a much larger reduction for itself and returned to a level of just above 8 million barrels a day. The Saudis maintained that level for nearly six years after the 1991 Gulf War before its economic needs prompted a rise in output.

Iranian officials said the breakthrough was secured when Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi held intensive discussions with Saudi Arabia's King Fahd Tuesday in Riyadh. Iran's official news agency IRNA reported that Fahd expressed hope that the deal will usher in a new era of cooperation between Iran and Saudi Arabia "that will help bring oil prices to a desirable level."

The recent oil glut has prompted a collective fall in income of nearly $50 billion over the past year for OPEC members. The impact on living standards and Venezuela. Even Saudi Arabia, the world's wealthiest and largest oil producer, is worried about public response to austerity measures after being forced to raise taxes and trim welfare budgets to cope with the depressed oil market.

Faced with such a bleak outlook, OPEC oil ministers said they felt there was no other choice but to make a dramatic gesture in curtailing production in the hope it will stimulate a price rise.' "The price had reached such a low level that it called for a drastic decision. We need a real shock to the market," said Libya's oil minister Abdallah Salem el-Badri.■

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

Japanese savers begin to eye dollar

By Sandra Sugawara

TOKYO—Kazuaki Ishii, a 48-year-old manager of a medical supply company, was watching closely last Friday as the yen bounced around the level of 142 yen to the dollar. If the dollar gets a bit cheaper, he said, he's ready to take $7,000 worth of his yen savings and convert it to dollars.

Until recently it never occurred to Ishii to put his savings into foreign currency or foreign assets. But with the Japanese yen, stock market and economy falling, Ishii is ready to take the plunge. "I am planning to invest in dollars pretty soon," Ishii said. "I want to see how it goes."

As the weakening yen threatens to destabilize currencies throughout Asia and prolong the region's economic crisis, Japanese authorities have been under intense global pressure to keep the yen steady. They have had to fend off increasingly skeptical currency speculators, who have been pushing down the yen, despite recent joint US. and Japanese actions to prop it up.

Now Japanese leaders are worried that an increasing number of Japanese individuals, like Ishii, and institutional investors, such as domestic insurance companies, are preparing to flee the yen as well. That would push the currency's value down further, putting more pressure on the currencies and economies of other financially ailing Asian countries, and possibly elsewhere in the world.

Members of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party have been discussing the problem, although they say they have no intention of imposing currency controls, which would appear to be backtracking on Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto's "Big Bang" efforts to deregulate the financial markets and transform Tokyo into a world financial center.

"Unofficially LDP members are discussing measures to control the outflow of currency, but they haven't yet come up with an effective plan," said Minoru Morita, a political commentator. Morita said the problem is that their options are limited because they can't do anything that would appear to be turning back the deregulation clock.

Most analysts said they do not expect the government to reimpose currency restrictions. They warned, however, that if Japan does not move quickly to restructure its financial systems, so that investors can get a reasonable return on their investments, the outflow of yen could increase.

Investors now can get only about 0.25 percent interest on regular savings accounts. Most stock investors have lost money in the Tokyo markets over the past year. The Japanese economy is in recession. Some Japanese investment magazines have warned that holding yen might be bad because the exchange rate could fall below 150 yen to the dollar.

Institutional investors, seeking better returns, already are sending more of their money abroad. The five largest insurance companies plan to increase their investment in foreign bonds, mainly US. Treasury bonds, by $12 billion this year, according to the Nihon Keizai Shimbun, Japan's leading financial newspaper.

The newspaper also said that in April the sales of mutual funds by foreign companies here surpassed those of Japanese companies. The performance of foreign mutual funds was helped by the strength of the dollar and the health of the US. and European stock markets.

Japanese funds, by contrast, were hurt by the poor performance of markets here. As a result, Japanese mutual funds in May increased the amount of foreign currency-denominated assets they hold to a six-year high of $31 billion, according to the Investment Trusts Association.

"From April to June, there was a high level of capital outflow from Japan,"said Masayuki Kichikawa, a senior economist with Nomura Research Institute. It is difficult to say if this pace will continue, but the amount of capital fleeing Japan could hit $107 billion this year, he said. But others are skeptical that a great number of Japanese will risk sending their savings overseas. Richard Jerram, a Tokyo-based economist with ING Barings Securities Ltd., said that Japanese investors "tend to be pretty risk averse and tend to have their money in places where their capital is guaranteed."■

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

MARKET WATCH 27-30 JUNE

Highest and lowest performing stocks in the Amman Financial Market

SATURDAY	%	SUNDAY	%	MONDAY	%	TUESDAY	%
* TADINCO	5.11	* Irbid Electricity	5.26	* Al-Nisr Insurance	5.06	* Union Bank	5.38
* Nuts Industry	5.56	* United Industry	5.00	* Irbid Electricity	5.00	* United Financial	5.41
* Arab Investment Bank	4.64	* Zara Investment	5.17	* TADINCO	5.30	* Gulf Insurance	5.30
* Al-Nisr Insurance	5.14	* Commercial Industry	5.31	* Jordan Kuwait Bank	3.16	* National Steel	5.66
* Industry Union	5.15	* National Cable	5.26	* Car Union	3.70	* National Investment	5.88
* trade Center	6.67	* Industrial Resource	5.17	* International Tourism	2.94	* United Industry	4.00

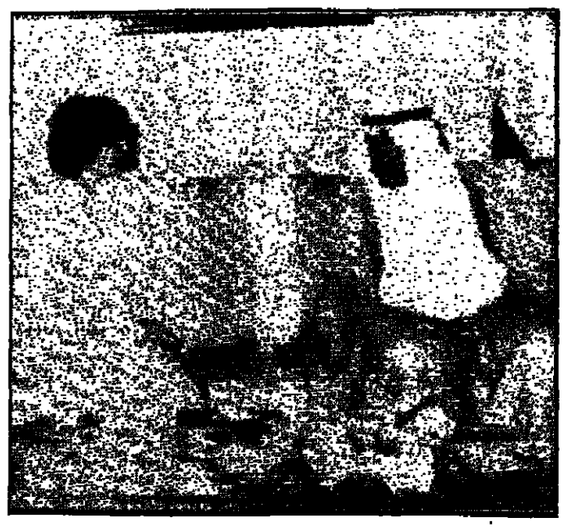
General Price Pointer	167.420		169.590		172.220		174.630
Trade Volume	780.664		128.9190		897.838		1068477
Stock Volume	569966		838927		560916		540029
Highest Traded Stocks							
* Al-Ahli Bank	140975	* Tourism Hotels	289.100	* Dar Addawa	131.984	* Arab Bank	433.725

All data provided by ACCESS Tel: 646868 Fax: 646949

The Star Jordan's political, economic and cultural weekly Online
http//: star. arabia. com

Rima Khalaf in Kuwait

JORDANIAN - KUWAITI ties are going back to their former level, thanks to a visit made by the Minister of Planning Rima Khalaf to Kuwait. Dr Khalaf met with Kuwaiti Crown Prince Saad Al Abdallah, Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmad and the Minister of Planning Ali Al Mousa. During the visit Dr Khalaf signed a loan agreement of JD 15 million to be received by Jordan from Kuwait. The loan, with an annual interest rate of 4.5 percent is to be repaid over a 22-year period. It will finance the construction of the King Abdallah Hospital, which will serve the northern parts of the kingdom. ■



Saudis think big as price falls

By Robert Corzine

SAUDIS THINK big as price falls are concentrating minds among oil-producing countries. Could a new exporters' alliance hold up prices any better than the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)? Saudi Arabia last week disclosed that it wants to see the creation of a new informal alliance of oil exporters. This raises questions about how such a group might operate, and whether it could succeed any better than OPEC in stabilizing revenues.

Ali Al Naimi, the Saudi oil minister, declined to say which of eight or nine countries might be potential members. But several big non-OPEC members such as Mexico and Russia meet his criteria of reserves, production capacity and dependence on oil revenues.

The fact that both countries sent senior officials to an OPEC meeting in Vienna last week, suggests they also share another characteristic laid down by Mr Naimi: "A willingness to co-operate to moderate prices at a level at which producers can continue to invest and at which consumers can feel they are not being gouged." But how would such a group implement a strategy of 'benign intervention' to keep oil prices steady, in a range of perhaps $18-$21 a barrel for UK benchmark Brent Blend and $20-$23 for West Texas Intermediate, the US price marker.

The key, says Mr Naimi, is that it would be "ready to supply more oil to the market or less oil," and to do so with little warning.

The Riyadh pact between Mexico, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela last March is clearly a model for Mr Naimi's vision. That agreement among the three biggest oil exporters to the US, the world's largest energy market, took oil traders and analysts by surprise. "It was a trigger mechanism for bigger thinking in this process," said Mr Naimi.

A bigger group would act in a similar way, intervening when necessary, according to Mr Naimi, or sitting on the sidelines when prices were within the target band. Although the Saudi proposal for a new exporter's alliance would not mean the demise of OPEC, it is an admission of OPEC's limitations.

The political and ideological history of OPEC and its occasional role as a focal point for Middle East political rivalries has been a barrier to wider co-operation with key non-OPEC producers, such as Norway, the second largest crude exporter.

OPEC's credibility has also been badly damaged in recent years because of widespread cheating on individual national quotas. In addition OPEC's growth as an institution has been deliberately stunted by its main members. Power within OPEC is held firmly by individual governments, with the secretariat in Vienna having no real influence.

Although OPEC has given Saudi Arabia an international stage on which to promote its policies of price moderation and oil market stability, the kingdom may find an informal alliance a more conducive way to oversee oil markets.

It would certainly offer Riyadh and other big producers a more discreet way of doing so than through the twice-yearly OPEC meetings, which often break down into public bickering. But the big question is whether the proposed alliance would prove any more effective than OPEC. "The name of the game is revenue," said Mr Naimi, "not market share or prices."

Traders say the threat of sudden action by leading oil players, can have the same effect as a co-ordinated action by central banks in the foreign exchange markets.

The Saudis may also have been motivated by a desire to have more say in the pricing of oil. Although physical supply and demand dictate oil's long-term price, 'paper traders' and speculators are a big influence on short-term prices, through oil futures markets in New York and London.

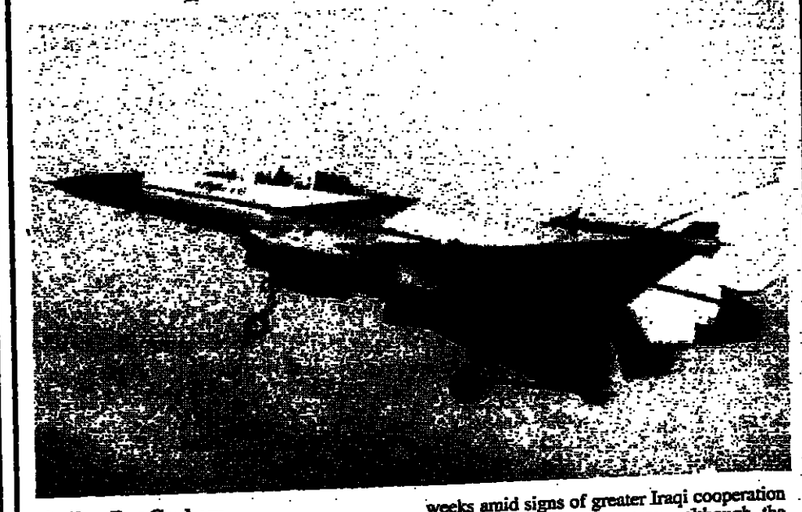
Some analysts suggest the Saudi proposal is directed more at causing uncertainty among paper traders than consumers. Certainly a price range of $18-$21 a barrel for Brent is seen by most analysts as relatively modest. Over the past 10 years Brent has mostly been in a $15-$20 band. Such prices have generally been high enough to meet the budget targets of OPEC states without posing a threat to consuming economies. They have also been sufficient to justify investment in the oil industries of higher cost countries outside of OPEC, and in alternative fuels such as natural gas.

An alliance might also be useful in helping deal with large-scale events in the international oil industry, such as the eventual lifting of sanctions against Iraq.

Perhaps the weakest link in the argument for a new oil exporters' alliance is holding it together beyond the current price collapse. With the governments of many oil producers looking at revenue falls of 35-40 per cent this year if prices stay low, there is a big incentive for co-operating in such a scheme. But many wonder if it would be as cohesive if prices returned to higher levels. ■

Financial Times Syndication

US jet fires missile at Iraqi air defence site



By Bradley Graham

WASHINGTON—A US F-16 fighter jet fired a missile at an Iraqi anti-aircraft site Tuesday after the site's radar targeted a British warplane participating in a routine patrol over southern Iraq, US military officials said.

Iraq denied it had tracked any of the 10 US and British planes taking part in the patrol, and US authorities said that there was no other Iraqi action. Defense Secretary William S. Cohen justified the shooting as "an act of self-defense," saying it was executed with "split-second" timing after the radar signal was detected.

Cohen said he hoped that the incident would prove an isolated example rather than the forerunner of any new Iraqi military escalation. But he warned that the United States would continue to do whatever is necessary to protect its pilots.

He also reported that the US missile, designed to home in on radar emissions, might have missed its target. In the absence of any evidence of a hit, some defense officials speculated that the radar may have been turned off just as the missile was released, throwing it off course.

During the seven years that the US and allied warplanes have patroled southern Iraq, enforcing a ban on Iraqi military flights, Iraqi air defenses have targeted them in a handful of reported cases, prompting US attacks. The last time a US plane fired on an Iraqi air defense site was in November 1996.

Tuesday's incident followed a protracted standoff with Iraq over the international inspection of suspected Iraqi weapons production and storage facilities. Heightened tensions earlier this year led to the buildup of US and British forces in the region. Most of those extra forces have been withdrawn in recent weeks amid signs of greater Iraqi cooperation with UN weapons inspectors, although the US has left about 160 warplanes and 12 ships in the region.

Further, the US and Britain continue to resist efforts at the United Nations by Russia, France and China to lift restrictions on all oil exports and other crippling economic sanctions imposed on Iraq at the time of the 1991 Persian Gulf War.

Last week, the chief UN arms inspector reported evidence that Iraq had loaded deadly VX nerve gas into warheads prior to the Gulf War, contradicting repeated assertions by Iraq that it had never succeeded in incorporating the poison gas into missiles. The next sanctions review is scheduled for October.

US military officials said four British GR1 Tornados were flying a normal patrol early Tuesday when one of the planes was illuminated by the radar from a Soviet-made SA-3 site in the vicinity of Basra. Allied authorities have repeatedly warned Iraq against targeting warplanes with air defense radars, since such action can precede the firing of a surface-to-air missile.

Four US F-16 fighter jets, flying out of Saudi Arabia, were also in the area, along with two US EA-6B electronic jamming aircraft. As the British jets veered away from the Iraqi radar, one of the F-16s fired a high-speed, anti-radiation missile, or HARM, at about 8:30 am Iraqi time (1:30 am EDT). All the allied planes returned safely, US officials said.

In Baghdad, an official at the Iraqi Culture and Information Ministry said no radar sites were hit and called the US firing "an aggression and unjustifiable action, that might lead to a new all-out assault against Iraq."

Los Angeles Times-Washington Post News Service

Drive to end female circumcision gains support among Egypt's Copts

By John Lancaster

TAYEBA, Egypt—When Miriam Bolas was 11 years old, her mother invited the local daya, or midwife, to slice off part of her genitals. She did not do this out of cruelty; like generations of Egyptian women, she believed that dulling her daughter's ability to enjoy sex would help preserve the girl's virginity and boost her prospects for marriage.

But Bolas, now married to a tenant farmer with two young daughters of her own, is determined to spare her children the same fate.

"My mother was ignorant and she was stupid," said Bolas, a forthright woman in her late thirties with prominent cheekbones and long dark braids streaming from beneath her black head scarf. "They just did it because everyone else did it. One generation gave it to the next generation. That's just how it was."

Not anymore—or at least, not in Tayeba. After an intensive eight-year effort by one of Egypt's largest nonprofit development groups, the practice of female circumcision—known to its critics as female genital mutilation—is disappearing from this farming village of 17,000 people in the Nile valley, 130 miles south of Cairo.

The outcome of the work by the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services—an offshoot of Egypt's Coptic Christian minority—amounts to a rare success story in a country where up to 97 percent of married or formerly married women have been circumcised. In that regard, Tayeba has emerged as a source of hope and practical guidance for human rights groups, healthcare workers and others seeking to eradicate female circumcision in Egypt and elsewhere in the developing world.

According to outside experts and field workers with the Coptic organization, the story of Tayeba demonstrates the need to attack the problem at its roots—educating not only women but also religious leaders and unmarried men—and in the broader context of enhancing women's status in society, such as improving access to education and health care.

"These things don't change overnight, and they don't change by force," said Samiha Katsha, an anthropologist at the American University of Cairo and co-author of a recent US-funded study on female circumcision in Egypt.

Tayeba is not entirely typical of its surroundings. Most of its residents are tattooed between thumb and forefinger with the small blue cross that identifies them as Coptic Christians, who account for roughly 10 percent of the 61 million people in this Muslim-dominated society.

At least by the standards of the impoverished Nile Valley, Copts tend to be better educated and are more prosperous than Muslims, and their leaders have generally accepted the argument that female circumcision has no basis in their faith. Muslim clerics, by contrast, are sharply divided on the matter. Several thousand years old, the ritual predates Christianity and Islam and occurs widely among followers of those and other faiths—not only in Egypt but also in Sudan and large swaths of sub-Saharan Africa.



Miriam Bolas, holding her son in the farming village of Tayeba, Egypt, says she was circumcised at the age of 11 but will not subject her two daughters to the ordeal.

A 1995 government survey concluded that "the practice of female circumcision is virtually universal among women of reproductive age in Egypt." The Egyptian form of circumcision typically involves full or partial removal of the clitoris and some surrounding tissue, according to the report; a more severe type is prevalent elsewhere on the African continent.

Typically performed by untrained midwives in the absence of anesthetic or sterile surgical equipment, the practice poses immediate health risks such as bleeding and infection and, over the long term, can cause problems in sexual relations and childbirth. Human rights groups and international agencies such as UNICEF increasingly have spoken against circumcision, calling it cruel and medically unnecessary.

After years of denying that the practice was common in Egypt, the government was jolted into action by a 1994 CNN report showing graphic footage of a hysterical 13-year-old undergoing the procedure at the hands of a Cairo barber. Last year, the Health Ministry overcame a court battle with Islamic fundamentalists to ban the practice, vowing criminal action against offenders.

But the government has pursued only a handful of cases—usually involving deaths caused by complications from the procedure—and experts in the field say its practical effect has been negligible. "If you have the majority of people practicing something, the law won't do anything," said Amal Hadi, a physician and researcher at the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies.

The Coptic organization addresses the problem as one aspect of raising living standards through programs in literacy, family planning and health care, among other things. Funded by American, UN and European aid agencies, among other sources, the group enters a village only with a signed invitation from community leaders and typically installs a two-person team to live there as long as seven years. The group also trains local volunteers, who help ensure that its work continues after the team leaves, and conducts extensive follow-up work.

The results have been impressive. Regarding female circumcision, the organization has achieved an unprecedented 'success rate' of 70 percent in eight mostly Coptic villages of Egypt's Upper Nile Valley, according to the US-backed study co-authored by Katsha, the anthropology professor. Success is measured on the basis of whether girls remain uncircumcised past the age of 12, as determined by interviews with their mothers.

Tayeba, with a success rate of about 80 percent, is a showcase for the organization's methods. When the Coptic group began its anti-circumcision effort here in 1990, it already had the support of religious and civic leaders and a well-established network of volunteers, typically older women of some standing in the village. The volunteers proved critical to the effort, making weekly house calls to instruct women in the rudiments of family planning and health care before cautiously working around to the topic of female circumcision. "I'm not going to them as an outsider saying, 'Please don't do it,'" said Margrit Mina, who runs health care programs for the organization in Minya governorate, where Tayeba is situated.

All the same, initial reactions were often hostile. They used to insist, "It was done to me, why shouldn't it be done to my daughter?" Zuza Marzook, a volunteer for 11 years, said at the church community center. "If it isn't done to her, won't she become a loose woman?"

"We explain to them that there's something called brains," Mina said. Assuming that message takes hold, the volunteers then solicit pledges from mothers that they will not circumcise their daughters. They make regular follow-up visits until the girl is 13.

The group's subtle proselytizing is evident in unusually frank attitudes toward sex. During a recent conversation with a foreign visitor at the church community center, village women talked with unblushing candor about the most intimate details of their personal lives. Nadia Jayed, for example, said she deeply regrets her own circumcision, carried out shortly before she married at 11. Although her change of heart came too late to spare her two eldest daughters, both of whom are now married, she expressed relief that her three younger daughters will not experience the same trauma.

"We tell them, 'Put some watermelon in your stomach, we're not going to do that again,'" she said, using a colloquial expression for "relax." "Now we know it brings us harm." ■

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

War, famine conspire to erode Dinka traditions

By Ann M. Simmons

WUN ROK, Sudan—Rosario Deng Bek is an anxious man. With four wives and more than 20 children—he's lost count—Bek, a Dinka from southern Sudan, has many mouths to feed at a time when famine threatens his homeland.

But equally troubling to Bek is the fact that his four unwed daughters may never marry, as few suitors have enough cattle to pay a bride's dowry, as is Dinka custom. Long-horned cattle—a symbol of wealth and the centerpiece of many Dinka cultural observances—are being sold for cash, slaughtered for food, stolen in raids, or are simply dying because drought has ruined grazing land.

And a decades-old civil war that pits the mainly Muslim government of the north against primarily Christian black African rebels in the south is exacerbating the Dinka peoples' inability to rear their beloved beast—and putting their age-old traditions in peril.

"What I see is the end of the Dinka way of life," said Diana Cammack, a social researcher who has been studying the behavior of southern Sudan's predominant ethnic group for the U.N. World Food Program. "Things are changing due to several decades of war, in addition to several years of drought. In between, there have been raids and bombings. What we're seeing now is a culmination of all this."

Except for 11 years of relative calm following a 1972 peace agreement, war has racked Sudan—Africa's largest nation, geographically—since it gained independence in 1956 from joint British and Egyptian rule. The southern rebels are demanding autonomy from the north, exemption from Islamic law and a fair share of development money. An estimated 1.3 million people have died since the modern phase of the war began in 1983.

A recent upsurge in fighting and a dry spell that has ravaged this season's harvest have put 2.6 million Sudanese, mostly in the southern provinces, in "dire" need of food, the United Nations said Friday.

Villagers living on parched, fly-infested plains have taken to digging up anthills to steal the insects' minuscule grain supply. Some try to survive on wild and often poisonous berries and on fruit from the tropical tamarind tree.

The Khartoum government did recently lift a ban on international aid flights, and the World Food Program announced Friday that it would more than double the amount of food it was airlifting into Sudan.

"We cannot mend or put a bandage on what the people have actually suffered already," said Lindsey Davies, a WFP information officer. "But we can give them some hope now."

What also worries the Dinka, however, is that they may never be able to repair the severe breakdown in their social structures. A Good Samaritan tradition that obliged Dinkas to help each other out during hard times has fallen away as families fight for their own survival. And local leaders estimate that more than 80 percent of Dinkas have lost their entire herds of cherished longhorns. Many refugees have been forced to leave their livestock behind. Bek gave up 50 longhorns and a few goats when he fled a rebel advance in January.

Southern Sudan is also plagued by mounted Arab militia groups known as murhaleen, who terrorize Dinka villages, stealing cattle and abducting women and children. Despite strong denials by the Khartoum government, both local and outside observers believe the bandits are paid and armed by the northern regime.

"With the armaments that are now out there, cattle raiding has become a military operation in many cases," said James Abelee, a UN security officer based in northern Kenya.

The beasts were commonly used in conflict resolution by traditional Dinka courts led by elders who would award them as compensation to an aggrieved party. Now this judiciary system has all but crumbled.

Hunger has also led some Dinkas to commit an unthinkable crime: killing another man's cattle for food. And many fathers in the community fear their daughters might be left on the shelf as few prospective husbands can present a dowry, even though the standard marriage gift has fallen from 100 head of cattle to between 30 and 50.

Even the decision to marry presents a dilemma. "These days you have to choose," Bek said. "Either you have a wife without food, or you have food without a wife."

"I'm worried because (my daughters) are the ones whose dowries will feed me," said Bek's second wife, Adher Ayuel, who is mother to six girls, two of whom are ready to become brides. "If they could get married, we'd be better off." Some parents, including Bek, are strongly considering giving their daughters away, with a promise of future settlement. "That's if I can find somebody who can feed them and be good to them," Bek said. "There's no alternative."

Few Dinka believe their lifestyle will return to normal any time soon. Southern rebels and the Khartoum government have agreed to hold an internationally supervised referendum on a new constitution and self-determination for the south. But the two sides remain deadlocked on other issues. ■

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

Shanghai s second heyday

By Maggie Farley

SHANGHAI, China—President Clinton's itinerary hadn't been published in any Chinese newspaper. But five days before his arrival, consultant Philip Qiu knew exactly what the American leader plans to do here.

Qiu saw the news on a Chinese-language Web site, and he wasn't the only one: The page registered almost 800,000 hits in two days.

"This is the way in Shanghai," he says. "There is still an impulse to control what people know and do, but there are more and more ways around it. I think our leaders know that we have to open to the outside world if we want a place on the world stage. They are just afraid of getting there before they're ready."

And so, between the lines and on the margins, this metropolis of 15 million people is awkwardly forging the way. The theme of Clinton's visit to Shanghai, which begins Monday, is to showcase the city of China's future—its entrepreneurs and free-market reforms, its skyscrapers and new homeowners—while glossing over the darker truths of China's present. It is a stop designed to show Americans that the Chinese have swapped their Mao suits for the Nike swoosh, and that they are becoming more like us.

But Shanghai is also a city in mid-leap, caught between time-honored tradition and transition to a more open and international society. This is a place where, while freewheeling experiments occur on China's economic and social frontier, officials may close one eye, endorsing those that succeed and stamping out the more unruly attempts. At the same time, it is the most closely observed place in China, because wherever Shanghai goes, so may China.

During his three days here, Clinton will visit Pudong, the city's new business district and a perfect example of Shanghai's uncertain lunging between the free market and the government's hand.

From atop the space-age Pearl Oriental TV tower, a quarter of a mile high, Shanghai, indeed, looks like the city of China's future. The Manhattanesque skyline of the new financial center includes Asia's largest stock exchange and the headquarters of myriad multinational corporations.

In a burst of if-we-build-it-they-will-come idealism in 1991, Shanghai's leaders earmarked $15 billion to create an instant metropolis from the remote farm plots of Pudong, hoping someday, this may become a global financial hub. But so far, it's a gleaming ghost town. With more than half the buildings still empty, the government forbade foreign banks from dealing in local currency unless they moved their headquarters there. Even so, landlords are still so desperate for tenants that when one US banker went hunting for a three-year lease for his company's office, the landlord offered him a "rent holiday." How long? Three years, was the reply—just let us use your name to attract other tenants.

Another stop on Clinton's schedule is the Shanghai Museum, a $100 million repository of China's art treasures, exquisitely displayed. Museum director Ma Chengyuan had to fight to preserve the site, on the edge of the expansive People's Square, from eager developers. Across the square, builders are putting the finishing touches on the $150 million Shanghai Grand Theater, an elegant glass-walled opera house designed, ironically, for Western arias, not Peking Opera.

Despite such ambitions to be a world-class cultural center, even the arts are not immune to the seesaw struggle here between old and new, innovation and ideology.

Days before the President's scheduled arrival, Shanghai's cultural czars blocked the very type of cultural exchange that both Chinese and US officials had landed as an example of improved relations. One of Shanghai's traditional opera troupes had been invited to perform the classic Chinese love story, 'The Peony Pavilion,' at New York's Lincoln Center beginning July 7.

The production had been in preparation for two years, and six tons of ornate sets had been crated and readied for shipment at Shanghai's airport. But at the last minute, the Shanghai Bureau of Culture's expert on traditional opera, Ma Bomin, deemed the troupe's interpretation 'feudal,' 'pornographic' and 'ignorant.'

After days of negotiations, Ma declared the sets could go on to New York. But she ordered that the troupe be sent outside Shanghai to rehearse revisions until the culture bureau deemed the new version acceptable. As a result, the planned New York presentation was canceled.

It is in the cultural arena that Shanghai's identity crisis is most vividly expressed. Despite periodic clamp downs, the culture bureau can't quite squelch the experimentation erupting in the city's nightclubs, galleries and back lanes.

While harking back to Shanghai's heyday—when there was a thin line between art, entertainment and vice—the search here for an updated aesthetic often has bizarre results.

Consider the stage show at the ritzy Golden Age nightclub. It offers scenes from 'Swan Lake,' Russian showgirls in plumed headdresses doing Las Vegas high kicks and, finally, karaoke with hostesses in wedding gowns. At Malone's, an American sports bar, a pierced-tongued transvestite torch singer croons Gershwin tunes two nights a week.

Many in Shanghai insist that the city's true talent is the art of commerce. After the late 'paramount leader' Deng Xiaoping launched China's economic reforms two decades ago, the city was intentionally held back by Beijing leaders wary of its commercial instincts.

But after finally winning special economic concessions, Shanghai has received every break from a regime now dominated by Shanghai government alumni who are eager to attract international investment and trade.

Shanghai is the home of China's first stock exchange, which boasts the biggest hall in the world, with 1,626 seats, despite a relatively-small capitalization. This bourse isn't exactly free, and, three years ago, the futures market was closed and all trades unwound after a bout of obvious price manipulation.

But stocks now have captured the imagination of pensioners, professional brokers and secretaries alike, who have few other options for investment. The index of 400-plus companies tends to float up and up, in defiance of economic indicators.

Shanghai is also the home of potential solutions to the country's biggest problems, as China tries to shift from a state-run economy to something more open. It is here that new banks and credit unions are making loans based on commercial factors rather than connections, breaking the custom that has burdened state-run banks with bad debt ratios that are among the highest in Asia.

It is Shanghai where private insurance companies are emerging to fill the needs of workers cut loose from the cradle-to-grave welfare benefits once supplied by the state.

Shanghai's progress is often a matter of two steps forward, one step back. And while it is becoming a model for many of China's other fast-growing cities, it is also revising its own values.

Every year, the city nominates worker-heroes on May Day. While the models of the past have included a plumber and a night-soil collector, this year, Bao Qifan, a manager and inventor who has been starting small private companies, won top honors.

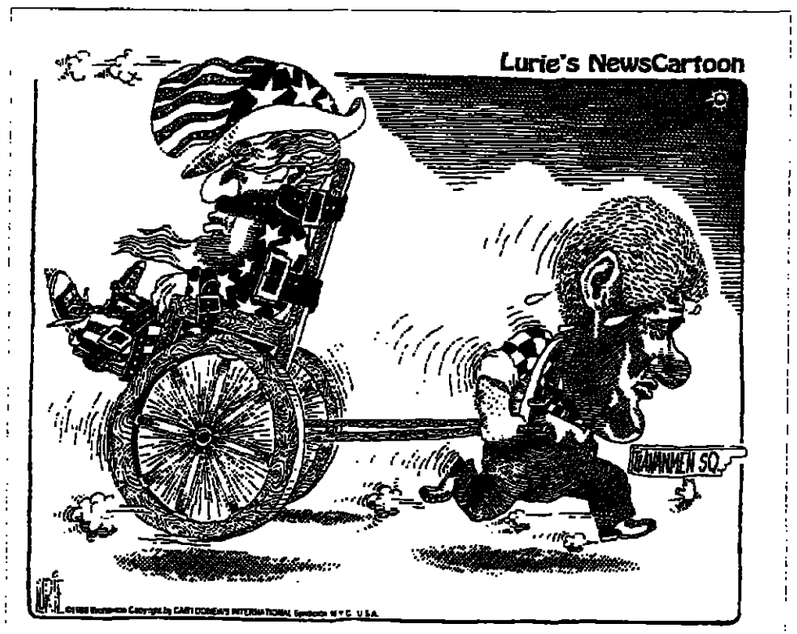
Bao, a former longshoreman, said he shares a secret with the city: adaptability and innovation. "Shanghai is a migrant society like the US," he said. "It can attract people from elsewhere and absorb new ideas. That's why we will succeed."■

LA Times-Washington Post News Service



Chinese President Jiang Zemin and his wife, Wang Yepin, this week greeted US President Bill Clinton and his wife, Hillary, at an official welcoming ceremony in Tiananmen Square, Beijing

Clinton makes 'proverbial' gaffe in Beijing toast



By Henry Chu

BEIJING—It wasn't quite JFK's "Ich bin ein Berliner" ("I am a jelly doughnut") blooper, but some Beijingers got a kick out of President Clinton's toast to his hosts Saturday night at the state banquet in Beijing's Great Hall of the People.

Quoting an "ancient Chinese proverb" (is there any other kind?), the president exhorted the United States and China to develop their friendship, and intoned: "Be not afraid of going slowly—be only afraid of standing still."

As with many such aphorisms, it's uncertain whether the proverb is of such old stock as is given out. And nowadays, the maxim that Clinton cited isn't usually applied to such grand matters as affairs of state or the destinies of nations. Instead, "Be not afraid of going slowly—be only afraid of standing still" is a proverb often invoked by Beijing cabbies and driving instructors fighting this city's awful traffic.

It's no secret that Clinton is a friendly, chatty guy who likes to work the crowds. Fortunately for him, the Chinese appear willing to be friendly and chatty right back. In an independent telephone survey conducted in advance of the president's visit, the Beijing-based polling firm Horizon found that 65 percent of those questioned would greet Clinton in amicable fashion if they met him. Out of 768 respondents, nearly one in four said they would flash the US chief executive a smile.

About 19 percent would go a step further by shouting, "Hello!" or "Mr. President, how are you?" while nearly the same number would merely wave in Clinton's direction. The poll also found that about 15 percent would simply stop and stare if they saw Clinton, although it was unclear exactly what frame of mind might inspire such a reaction. Only 3 percent of those surveyed said they would be brave enough to "run over to him and start talking." But extrapolated to the Chinese population of 1.2 billion, even that tiny proportion would present Clinton with 36 million people ready to engage him in conversation, which might be too much even for him.

Let Clinton lock horns with the Chinese Communist leadership over human rights, or negotiate nuclear arms policies, or chat with 36 million people. Members of his entourage, including high-ranking U.S. officials, have betterthings to do. Take Secretary of Commerce Bill Daley. On Sunday, while Clinton attended church and plumped on behalf of religious freedom in China, Daley was a few miles away, marking an important milestone in both Chinese and U.S. business history: the opening of a new Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet. But it was no ordinary restaurant. "It's the 10,000th KFC worldwide," said Ayesha Qureshi, a publicist who was busy trying to round up reporters tocover the event and maybe grab a piece or two of Original Recipe.

With hundreds of U.S. officials and journalists descending on China these past few days, some instruction in cross-cultural understanding would not go amiss. So the two governments have issued primers for their respective citizens to help each side figure out the other.

On a Beijing-backed Web site providing up-to-date coverage of the Sino-US summit, Chinese browsers can learn how to deal with their loud, informal guests.

"Americans do not like silence," the Web site advises. "They talk confidently and loudly. Silence does not indicate approval. They are silent only when they disagree with you and think you have said something rude." But woe to the innocent Chinese who encroaches on an American's personal space during a confident and loud conversation. "American people do not feel comfortable unless the person they are talking to keeps a 20-inch distance," the primer warns.■

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

'Bridging the gap' is theme of world AIDS conference

By David Brown

GENEVA—Sometime soon, maybe even this week, a company called Medical Access Uganda, Ltd., will begin distributing anti-viral drugs to about 2,000 people in that African country.

In a country with 930,000 people infected with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), that barely counts as a start. Nevertheless, until a year ago the idea of bringing the best AIDS treatment in the world to an impoverished nation in sub-Saharan Africa was inconceivable.

The Uganda initiative is perhaps the most dramatic example of 'Bridging the Gap,' the theme of the 12th World AIDS Conference, a huge biennial meeting that opened here Sunday and is due to end this Friday.

More than 12,700 people have gathered for hundreds of presentations on the biology of HIV, prevention and treatment of the infection, and the myriad social, personal and economic issues the epidemic has raised in every nation in the world.

The meeting comes two years after a similar gathering in Vancouver heralded the first significant breakthrough in HIV treatment—the use of three-drug combinations of anti-virals to suppress the infection into quiescence. The continued success of that strategy, as well as its failures and its unanticipated side effects, is expected to be a major focus of the meeting.

At the opening ceremonies, however, it was the contrast between triple therapy's benefits to people in wealthy countries, and its nearly complete unavailability to the poor regions of Africa and Asia, where 89 percent of the world's HIV-infected live, that was the main object of comment.

"What is the international community doing about it?" asked Guy-Olivier Segond, a public health official in the canton of Geneva. "What are drug producers doing for those who cannot afford treatment? What is the North doing for the South? In law, or even before the judgment of history, are they not guilty of withholding assistance to persons in danger?"

"The biggest AIDS gap of all is the gap between what we know we can do today, and what we are actually doing," said Peter Piot, director of UNAIDS, a joint program run by several United Nations agencies, and the World Health Organization and the World Bank.

A report released last week by Piot's organization estimated the number of HIV infections worldwide to be 30.6 million. About 5.8 million of those were acquired in the last year. Since the start of the epidemic, 11.7 million people have died of AIDS, 2.3 million of them in 1997. In the last three years, 27 countries have seen their HIV infection rates more than double. In parts of the former Soviet Union, where intravenous drug use is powering a small but rapidly growing epidemic, rates have risen six-fold.

"Let us be clear in our message to the world that this epidemic is truly out of control in many countries," Piot told the gathering at a cavernous hall in the Palexpo Conference Center.

Some recent clinical advances could realistically benefit at least some people in the developing world, while others serve more to accentuate the gap this meeting is drawing attention to. In the important issue of mother-to-child transmission of the virus, both trends are evident.

A study in Thailand early this year showed that a short course of AZT given at the end of pregnancy and during delivery can cut virus transmission to the infant to half what it would be without the antiviral drug. That is not as dramatic as the two-thirds reduction gained by a more onerous and expensive AZT regime used in the United States, but still rates as a huge advance.

Research described here Saturday in advance of the meeting showed that elective Cesarean section can reduce transmission even further. A team of French scientists found that only 1 percent of infants became infected if their mothers took the full preventative treatment with AZT, delivered their babies by Cesarean, and did not breast feed. A team headed by Jennifer S.

Read of the National Institutes of Health analyzed numerous existing studies and came up with a 2 percent rate of transmission under those conditions.

Neither Cesarean section nor (in most places) abandonment of breast feeding is practical for women in poor countries. But short-course AZT may be. UNICEF is currently working on bringing the drug to pregnant women in 10 nations, most of them in Africa.

The project involves far more than simply securing the medication. HIV testing of pregnant women will actually be the more-expensive task, and a system of counseling and clinical follow-up of the women must be in place for any program to get off the ground.

Bringing combination anti-viral therapy to Uganda will probably be even more difficult.

That effort is one of four pilot projects—the others are in Ivory Coast, Vietnam and Chile—UNAIDS is undertaking to try to narrow what is now the most obvious and cruel gap between the HIV-infected haves and have-nots.

In the last six months, Ugandan officials and a UNAIDS physician, Joseph Saba, have organized the first rational system of HIV care in the country. Four hospitals have been judged ready to dispense combination therapy. They have had to meet a long list of criteria, from laboratory capability of measuring viral load and CD4 count, to good accounting practices in their pharmacies.

Two levels of small hospitals and clinics have also been certified to deliver HIV care for opportunistic infections and pain control, but not for anti-viral therapy. A local advisory board has been established to set the guidelines for inclusion in the program, which will hinge on both deeply discounted drugs and payments from the patients themselves. (The drugs provided by the two lower levels of clinic are generally cheaper than anti-virals and will be prescribed for free.)

Even this small program for a lucky few will be less than optimal, its organizers admit. Only about one-third of the 2,000 initial patients will be able to afford triple therapy. The rest will take only two drugs—a regimen considered substandard in the United States and other wealthy countries.

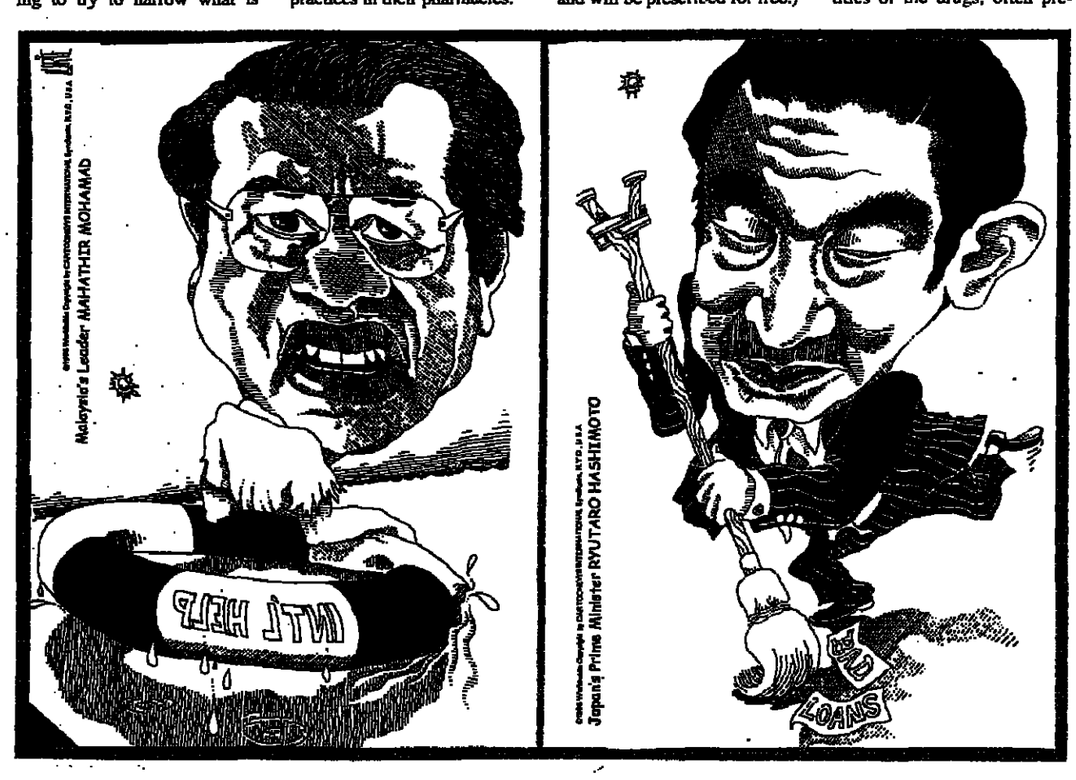
"We can't hide from the fact that antiretroviral therapy has already reached our country (in the form of small quantities of the drugs, often prescribed and taken incorrectly)," Dorothy Ochola-Odongo, the national coordinator for the Ugandan initiative, said from Kampala last week. "It is the right time to put a system in place so that at least there is proper administration, proper monitoring for resistance."

The experience of the last two years has shown that even in places where there is greater wealth and greater expertise in AIDS care, troubling gaps are opening up between the optimal and the actual.

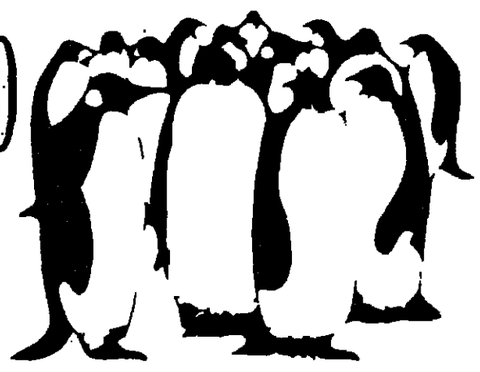
A survey sponsored by Merck, the drug manufacturer, found that one-quarter of people in the United States who are started on HIV treatment are prescribed therapy that is not recommended in an explicit guideline set forth by the Department of Health and Human Services. Another survey found that 43 percent of patients admitted not taking their drugs as prescribed.

And the drugs themselves are doing unexpected things. A growing number of patients on triple therapies that include protease inhibitor drugs—and a few on combinations without protease inhibitors—are experiencing changes in their body-fat composition, and steep rises in their bloodstream cholesterol levels. In rare cases, successful triple therapy awakens quiescent diseases, such as lupus. These side effects, and their potential hazards, are expected to get much attention here this week.■

LA Times-Washington Post News Service



AROUND TOWN



Princess Rania visits GAM

■ Her Royal Highness Princess Rania Al Abdallah with Amman Mayor Dr Mamdouh Al Abadi, during her visit to the offices of the Greater Amman Municipality, Tuesday.



Performing Arts Center:

Inspiring creativity and teaching values to youth

By Ghasan Joha
Special to The Star

Today people the world-over are talking increasingly about the rights of children and their need to live in a peaceful and prosperous world. Here in Jordan these needs are well regarded and punctuated by the Royal family.

For that reason the Noor Al Hussein Foundation was established in 1985 to provide for the different development needs of children in Jordan.

The Performing Arts Center (PAC) has played a part over the past 11 years to provide some of these needs. The Center has implemented many successful regional and national programs.

"The main objective of PAC is to unbind the differences between Arab children in creative ways and show the need for solidarity between them," **Lina Ettal**, director of the Arts Center, told *The Star*.



Ettal

That objective is clearly presented during the annual Arab Children's Congress which holds its 18th session in Amman this week under the patronage of Her Majesty **Queen Noor**. "The congress seeks in the most developed way to promote the socio-economic development in response to the needs, talents and aspirations of Arab children," adds Ettal who is the director of the congress.

PAC holds cultural and educational festivals, seminars and art production programs. These include theater productions, theater workshops for young people, Drama-in-Education and other new methods of education using multimedia.

According to the director, these programs have been enhancing the potential talents of the under 16-year-olds who constitute 60 percent of the population so that they scan present "their artistic ability in the visual arts, drama and dance. These programs have been promoting tourism in Jordan successfully." Ettal, who is best known for her role in the TV series 'Al Manahel' in the 1980s added.

Ettal, who holds a master degree in theatrical education from the University of Wales in the UK, often directs programs and plays and writes stories for children and adults.

Presently PAC has seven administrative staff and 14 professional staff of actors/teachers, dancers, musicians and designers). It has four departments that manage the performing arts.

The first is the Theater and Dramatic Arts Department, which offers the opportunity for youths to develop their talent and to have a comprehensive education in the fields of theatrical arts. The center follows the curriculum of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington.

The second department is devoted to dance. It offers training to young people in the different forms of dance. Next is the production department, which is responsible for producing plays, dance performances, music concerts and educational documentaries.

The last department provides training in the arts. "PAC has been a pioneer in introducing and providing arts-in-education training programs to serve national education and cultural development," said Ettal. The programs have reached all social sectors in Jordan, including remote villages and cities in the Kingdom.

There is one other program, which could be termed 'peace education.' PAC has moved a step further by implementing the 'Education-for-Peace' program entitled "Creative Conflict Resolution Skills." It is known nationally as Al Kanafeesh and it is produced in cooperation with the Spanish organization CODESPA.



Queen Noor talks to children following a performance at last year's Children's Festival

The program is divided into two parts: for children between the ages of 10-12; and teenagers. "These plays are the backbone of the project for the children so that they can interact with each other and speak out on resolving major conflicts."

In the case of the Education-for-Peace program, the objective is to teach conflict resolution skills to children, to raise awareness among young people about the benefits of global peace, to develop a sense of respect and pride in their cultural heritage, and last but not least, to teach them about the role of democratic responsibility in relation to matters of national interest.

More that 100,000 people, including young children, youths, mothers, fathers, and teachers have benefited from the center since it was founded in 1987. Two years ago, the Center has moved to its current site behind the Martyr's Memorial. Last year PAC received a special award for its annual congress.

"The award was presented by the Arab World Higher Council for Children in the UAE for the unique services we afford Arab children," Al Tal said. This year's congress is titled "The Arab Child's Rights" and lasts till 8 July. It includes a rich program of activities organized by distinguished specialists and guests. This year's guest of honor is the prominent Syrian actor **Duraid Lahan**, whose is the Ambassador of Children for Unicef in Demascus.

A song titled "A United Homeland" has been written especially for the Congress. About 15 Arab countries are participating in this year's session. ■

SCRAPBOOK

Football buff or not, three cheers for the World Cup!

By Lulu A Khasawneh

I HATE football. Try as I might, I cannot begin to understand how otherwise perfectly rational young men can make such perfect fools of themselves over a ball. Despite this, I still love the World Cup and it is not because this perfectly rational young women has gone all irrational either. It is simply because the World Cup has nothing to do with football, and everything to do with life.

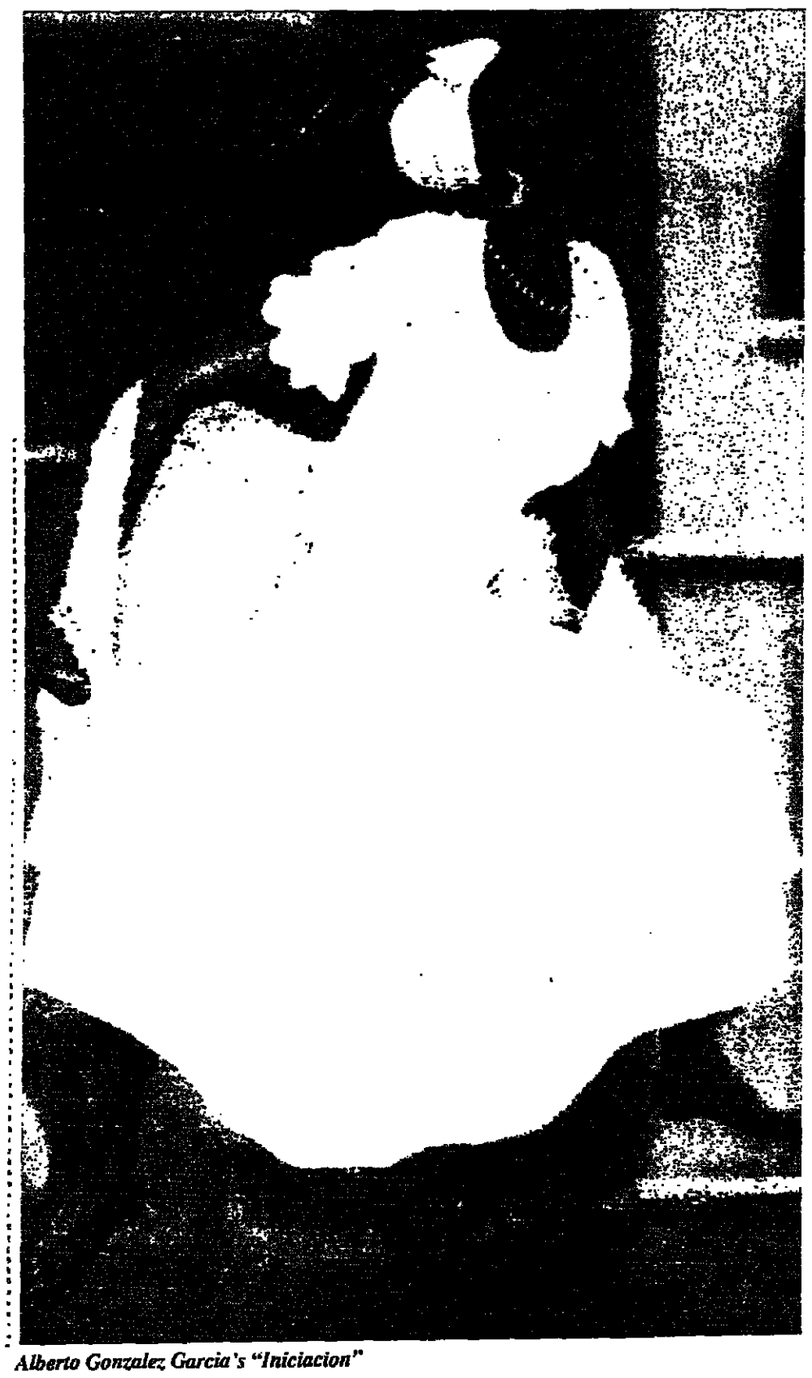
It's you and me, and everything your Grade 1 teacher told you about winning and losing. It's so completely and utterly straightforward; get that ball into the net and you're a hero. Yes, I know we all discovered during our adolescence that heroes tend to have a short sell-by date, like that of the tooth fairy. But if we are honest with ourselves for just for a second, diregarding our usual cynicism, haven't we all had brief, shining moments of complete and utter glory? Just think of the day your child was born, or when you got that promotion at work. If this isn't enough and you want to be reminded even more just how simple life can be, the World Cup has it's own in-built justice system. It's a replica of your idyllic childhood, albeit in fancy dress. Come on, you know there was something familiar about him right from the beginning. I'm talking about the referee—the law abiding headmaster you held in such awe because you thought he was infallible. Indeed, they should sell rose-tinted glasses alongside the T-shirts and banners, bearing the France '98 logo!

Of course, the secret of the World Cup's winning formula is the very fact that it is not only about winning. Feelings of elation we experience watching the faces of the winning team are immediately shattered when the camera shifts and focuses on the losing team. Feelings of disappointment, humiliation, and of not letting others or yourself down, are familiar to us all, no matter where we are from.

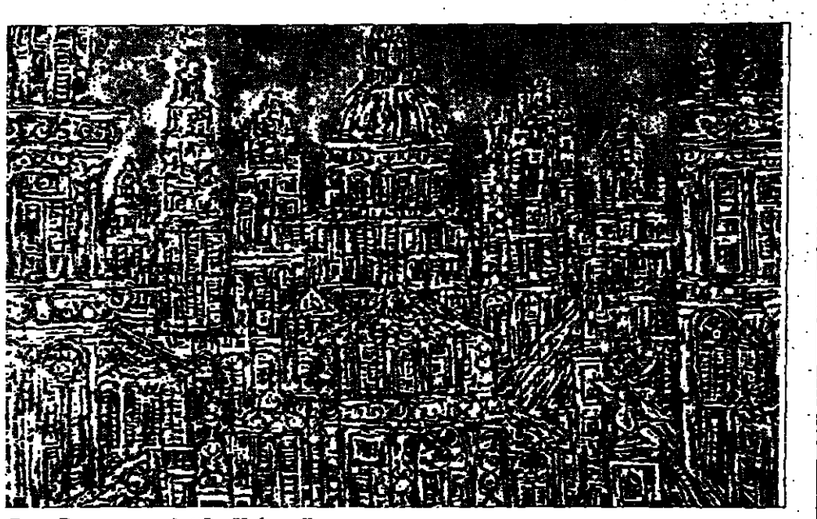
In this day and age, when you hardly know who your next door neighbor is, it is nothing short of a miracle to find yourself totally involved in a heated discussion about last night's game with complete strangers at the greengrocers. Then you think it can't really have been you, jumping up and down on the sofa last night. Then you realize that it wasn't really the skill of the football that had you so engrossed, but your son's non-stop commentary (if only he could be so particular about details when it came to his history exam) about the player with the unpronounceable name who has been paid an unimaginable amount of money, and whose disappointing performance and failure to score so far in the tournament could signal the end of his career. I ask you, who can turn away from the box when his fate hangs in the balance? Not even 'The Bold and the Beautiful' has such nail-biting drama.

But of course, there is a very worrying aspect to all this. Withdrawal symptoms should not be taken lightly. What will we do for excitement from now until World Cup 2002? I suppose Wimbledon will just have to do, although I don't really like tennis either... I wonder how poor Monica Seles is doing now that she has lost her beloved father? ■

Cervantes Institute showcases Cuban art



Alberto Gonzalez Garcia's "Iniciacion"



Rene Portocarrero's "La Habana"

By Star Staff Writer

The magic of Cuban art has arrived in Jordan. The current exhibition entitled "100 Years of Cuban Painting" at the Cervantes Institute seeks to bring different cultures closer together.

The exhibition is a selection of major works from 21 Cuban artists, which are on loan from the National Art Museum in Havana, Cuba.

The display comprises original paintings and prints from the most famous artists of the island, and includes both works from earlier generations, as well as works from present day artists, notably: Rene Portocarrero, Wilfredo Lam, Victor Manuel, Amelia Pelaez, Carlos Enrique, Cabrera Moreno, and Mariano Rodriguez.

Different styles and forms are evident, all of which express the original culture and national pride of Cuba. All the artists' works have been strongly influenced and enriched by the various forces that have converged over the years onto this small island.

Spain and Africa are the two strongest influences (but are by no means the only ones), and they have helped to cultivate the unique style of Cuban Art.

Two works on display by Rene Portocarrero, 'Flora' and 'La Habana', capture this influence well. Other works of particular interest include 'Iniciacion' by Alberto Gonzalez Garcia, 'Ventana Cubana' by Angel Delgado, and 'La Habana Vieja' by Rafael.

The exhibition is a part of the centennial commemorations underway, which expresses the close ties between Cuba and Spain, and it is, without doubt, the finest representation of Cuban Paintings ever shown in the Middle East.

"100 Years of Cuban Paintings" is now being shown among the pleasant surroundings of the Cervantes Institute in Jabal Amman, close to 3rd Circle (Tel:4610858). The display will be in Amman until 15 July, and is open to the public from 9 am to 8 pm, daily except Fridays. ■

AGENDA

Exhibitions

■ Art exhibition by **Mohammad Abu Zureiq** continues till 19 July at Rowaq Al Hussn near Irbid.

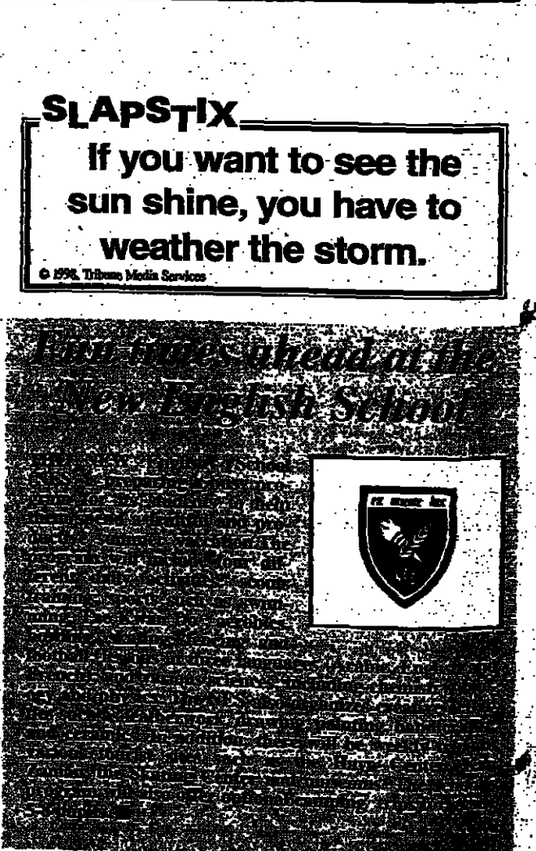
■ Arab art exhibition at Al Zowadeh Restaurant in Rowaq Al Balqa'. It continues till 15 July.

■ Iraqi Artist **Khlief Mahmood** at Gallery Bawran in Sweifieh. It continues till 15 July. Also at the Gallery, and ending at the same time is an exhibition by **Ghaid Al Badran**.

■ An exhibition of the 3rd anniversary of the establishment of the **Hamourabi Gallery** continues till 30 July. About 200 exhibits are on display, including ceramics and carvings by Jordanian and Arab artists.

■ '100 years of Cuban painting' is an exhibit that starts at the Cervantes Institute on 28 June. It ends on 15 July.





The Star's GUIDE TV

Programs on JTV from 4 — 10 July

Amman cinemas

- **Philadelphia I (Tel: 4634149):** That Old Filling
- **Philadelphia II (Tel:4634149):** In Love 7 War
- **Galleria I (Tel: 079 33430):** *As Good As It Gets*
- **Galleria II (Tel: 079 33430):** *Air Bud*
- **Plaza (Tel: 5699238):** Titanic
- **Concord I (Tel: 5677420):** Vegas Vacation
- **Concord II (Tel: 5677420):** Cospiracy Theory

ENGLISH PROGRAMS

SATURDAY
3:00—Holy Koran
3:10—Family Dog (Cartoon)
3:30—I Wanna Be _
4:00—Neighbors
4:30—Ocean Wilds (Doc.)
5:00—French Prog. (Doc.)
6:00—Acapulco Bay
7:00—News in French
7:15—French Prog.
7:30—News Headlines
7:35—You Bet Your Life
8:00—Prism (Talk Show)
8:30—Sirens (Police Drama)
9:30—News At Ten
10:00— World Cup
11:45—Feature Film: *Cooperstown*
Starring: Josh Charles and Hope Large.

SUNDAY
3:00—Holy Koran
3:10—The Pumpkin Patc
3:20—The Pink Panther
3:30—The Adventure of the Black Stallion
4:00—The American Chart Show (Music)
5:00—Super Star Sport(Doc.)
6:00—French Prog.
7:00—News in French
7:30—News Headlines
7:35—Life's most Embarrassiag Moments
8:00—Football Summary
8:30—Challenges (Talk Show)
9:10—Renegade (Drama)
10:00—News at Ten
10:30—Correll
12.00—The History of Rock 'n' Roll

MONDAY
3:00—Holy Koran
3:10—Highlander (Cartoon)
3:30—The Worst Day of My Life (Drama)
4:00—Neighbors (Drama)
4:30—Last Frontiers (Doc.)



Bay atch Nights, Monday at 11:10 pm.

5:00—French Prog.
6:00—Acapulco Bay
7:00—News in French
7:15—French Prog.
7:30—News Headlines
7:35—Hope and Gloria
8:00—War Lords (Doc.)
9:10—Good Guys, Bad Guys
10:00—News At Ten
10:30—Law & Order
11:10—Bay Watch Nights

TUESDAY
3:00—Holy Koran
3:10—Pro Stars
3:30—Small Talk
4:00—Border Town (Drama)
4:30—Baby It's You
5:00—The Route of Capricorn
6:00—French Program
7:00—News in French
7:15—French Programs
7:30—News Headlines
7:35—Step by Step
8:00—What would you do?
8:30—The Sculptress
9:30—News in English
10:00—World Cup
11:45—Feature Film: *Appointment for Killing*

WEDNESDAY
3:00—Holy Koran
3:10—Mr Bogus Show
3:30—Castle of Adventures
4:00—The Album Show
5:00—Ushuaia (French Doc.)
6:15—Acapulco Bay
7:00—News in French
7:15—French Programs
7:30—Buddies (Comedy)
8:00—Envoye Special
8:30—Kung-Fu
9:30—News in English
10:00—World Cup
11:45—The Seekers

THURSDAY
3:00—Holy Koran
3:10—Dinky Dis (Cartoon)
3:30—The Animal Park
4:00—French Doc.
4:30—Blue Water Dreaming
5:00—N.B.A
6:15—Sliders (Luck of the draw)
7:00—News in French
7:15—French Programs
7:30—News Headlines
7:35—Family Matters
8:00—Football Summary
8:30—Dr. Quinn Medicine Woman
9:10—Oprah Winfrey
10:00—News At Ten
10:30—Feature Film: *Isabel's Choice*

FRIDAY
3:00—Holy Koran
3:10—Teddy Ruxpin
3:30—Wishbone
4:00—Feature Film: *The Comrades of Summer*
6:15—De Fort Boyard
7:00—News in French
7:15—French Program
7:30—News Headlines
7:35—The Fresh Prince of Bel Air
8:00—The Footsteps of Alexander the Great
8:30—The Brain
9:10—Babylon 5
10:00—News at Ten
10:30—The Seekers

PROGRAMMES EN FRAN AIS
SAMEDI
17:00—Faut pas rêver
19:00—Le journal
19:15—Magazine L'œuf de Colomb

DIMANCHE
18:00—Bonne espérance
19:00—Le Journal
19:15—E=M6

LUNDI
17:00—Thalassà
19:00—Le Journal
19:15—Cinq sur Cinq

MARDI
18:00—Les cœurs brûlés (10)
19:00—Le Journal
19:15—Fractales

MERCREDI
17:00—Ushuaïa
19:00—Le Journal
19:15—E=M6
20:00—Envoyé spécial

JEUDI
16:00—L'école des fans
19:00—Le Journal
19:15—Atomes crochus

VENDREDI
17:30—Fort Boyard
19:00—Le Journal
19:15—Allô la Terre

Programs are subject to change by JTV

Music

Twisted Nixon

A band with a twisted message

By Rasheed Al Roussan

Since the rise of rock 'n' roll in the US in the late fifties, music has never been the same. The harmonious sounds of Elvis Presley, The Beatles and Little Richard have echoed around the world announcing a new wave of musical expression. At the same time, the Sexual Revolution, the Vietnam war, along with the Civil Rights movement fused together creating a modern revolutionary view which rock music has used as it's emblem. Bands all over celebrated peace, humanity and liberty. It was the typical American dose given to every youngster. The roots of rock music go back to the traditional music of several cultures, like Gospel music, blues, country, classical, African and Latin folk songs.... etc. In 1976, a new wave of rock and punk appeared in New York City and London, as a reaction against the commercialism of mainstream rock.



Bands like the Sex Pistols, the Clash and the Police performed music that is characterized as raw, abrasive and fast.

A new Californian punk band by the name of Twisted Nixon has lately produced two singles, 'Stone Throwing Riot,' and 'Left is Right.' This record comes after their first album released in 1996, titled 'In Punk We Trust.' Interestingly enough, the two singles talk about the Palestinian problem and the peace process negotiations. The first single 'Stone Throwing Riot,' is a revolutionary song where the band presented their views about the Middle East peace process, describing it as a failure:

Peace Process, what a fable,
United Nation falls on its face,
the US Congress what a disgrace.

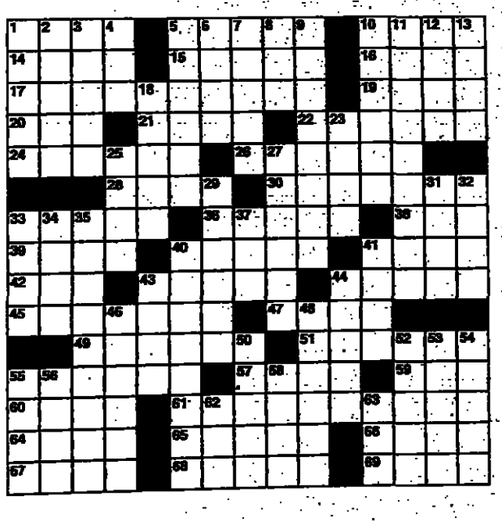
The band advocated the legitimate continuation of the Intifada. The lyrics are explicit, simple and direct, yet nevertheless, their musical presentation is weak and unattractive. They use three instruments; two electrical guitars (lead and rhythm) and drums, played at a monotonous pattern through-out all their songs. The guitar solo is an improvisation, rather than a tune with an entity. In their second single 'Left is Right,' they condemned the helpless efforts held by the US and the United Nations in relation with the Palestinian dilemma. The song is lively, innovative, and the music is more colorful in comparison than the former song. The lyrics express a confused state of mind where everything is misinterpreted, and camouflaged:

The six O'clock news keeps calling,
I have been trying to see the world through their eyes,
where black is white, day is night.

However the question lies whether the band really cares about the well-being of Palestinians or not. We have to ask ourselves do they mean what they say? Or are they using this issue as means to win popularity and later financial gain? In the single 'Stone Throwing Riot,' they make a skeptical sentence which makes it easier to question their morality, 'knocking down homes in Ramallah, where is Allah?' It is a direct threat to Islam and the idea of salvation; they are implying that there is no redemption for the Palestinians if they just wait for Allah to save them.

Finally, the messages from this kind of music are basically directed to adolescents and it is being widely spread everywhere through the tempting screens of the Internet. People are being affected by shallow words coming out from many inferior bands. Twisted Nixon is not an exception; they are a band with a twisted name and a twisted

CROSSWORD PUZZLE



ACROSS
1 Thaw
5 Continued without pause
10 Amess sci-fi film
14 Dies
15 Eat away
16 Reputation
17 Christmas confections
19 Ma Bell's code
20 Dined
21 Othello's friend
22 Went sightseeing
24 Inn
26 Deli item
28 Building wings
30 Used graffiti
33 Made a bow
36 Sign of sorrow
38 One of a Latin trio
39 Predict (the future)
40 Coiffure
41 Blue dye
42 Sunburn
43 Scope
44 Employ
45 Green stone
47 Signet
49 Respectful greeting
51 Threefold
55 Kind of sandwich
57 Blind as _
59 Tic-tac-toe winner
60 One-celled plant
61 Figure in Greek architecture
64 Bed board
65 Banish
66 Lucy's ex
67 Deli sandwich
68 Transactions
69 Arabian port

DOWN
1 O.T. prophet
2 Muse of poetry
3 Bowling alleys
4 Knight or Koppel
5 Order to return
6 " and a bone"
7 Forbidden acts
8 Poem
9 Those who cuddle
10 Emotional shock
11 Tropical cyclone
12 Robert _
13 Anthropologist Margaret
18 Cede
23 Nerds
25 _ off (irate)
27 Saws
29 "Don't ghost of a chance"
31 Moslem ruler
32 Ass
33 Commedia dell' _
34 Paper measure
35 Sweetener
37 Sch. subj.
40 Rare kind of budget
41 Car part
43 Breathing sound
44 Planet
46 Old-fashioned collar
48 Day's matches
50 Craze
52 Exhibiting annul
53 Slack
54 Red dye
55 Impetuous
56 Fashion magazine
58 Gong
62 Felling tool
63 Harem room

—THIS WEEK'S— HOROSCOPE

By Linda Black

Weekly Tip: As the moon goes into Aries, people stop arguing and start taking action.

Aries (March 21-April 19). You're liable to find something valuable hidden in a secret place. That should motivate you to clean out those closets.

Taurus (April 20-May 20). Meet with your team and get an unresolved matter talked out. You'll soon be ready to make new plans.

Gemini (May 21-June 21). Figure out what an older person needs and you could earn a bonus. That's better than getting into a fight, which could happen if you DON'T tend to this person's needs.

Cancer (June 22-July 22). Contact a distant friend for an attitude adjustment. You've been under pressure lately and a few kind words will make a big difference.

Leo (July 23-Aug. 22). Take care of financial matters. If you get them handled now, you can concentrate on other things. That's important, since you may get the chance to compete.

Virgo (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). Rely on your partner's hunch to find your way out of the maze. Logic won't work, but imagination and creativity might.

Libra (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). You're sharp so plan your week now. You're busy, don't keep your head down the whole time or you'll lose sight of your objective.

Scorpio (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). Find the perfect item to fix up your home. Fun and games are predicted with a few minor complications thrown in to keep things exciting.

Sagittarius (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). You're learning fast, which is good. Use what you've learned to mend a breakdown at home. Love beckons but take care. This is not a casual fling.

Capricorn (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). Your work's cut out for you. Invest in a new tool to learn a new trick. Stay close to home and plan your next move.

Aquarius (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). Make up your mind. Once your decision is made, you'll know what action to take. Buy what you need.

Pisces (Feb. 19-March 20). You could wake up with a list in your head. Write down as much as you can remember. Your imagination's working overtime.

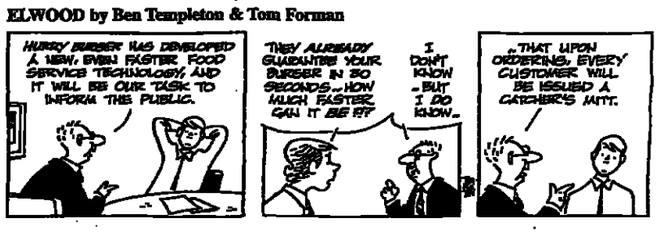
If You're Having a Birthday This Week: If you concentrate your attention, you should be able to get a good-sized promotion by March. Right now, you need to make plans and take action.

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PERKY & BEANZ by Russell Myers



ELWOOD by Ben Templeton & Tom Forman



CATFISH by Fred Wagner & Tom Cone





"... Gentlemen, note that when this subject picked up the little sailboat he went, 'vahrrrooom, vahrrrooom'..."

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Jumble

Unscramble these four words, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

BICCU
ZUFYZ
TINTEK
RASITE



Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Answer here: A "_____-_____"

Answers: CUBIC FUZZY KITTEN SATIRE

Answer: The "scientific" name for a champagne maker — A "FIZZ-ICIST"

Words of Wisdom

Imitation may be flattering, but it never got anyone anywhere.

• • •

If you give something and expect to get something in return, it is not a gift but a trade.

• • •

It's one thing to look back fondly on the good old days; it's quite another to return to them.

• • •

You will appear to be wiser if you're silent about things of which you are ignorant.

• • •

You can spend an evening with some people, but with others, you pay dearly.

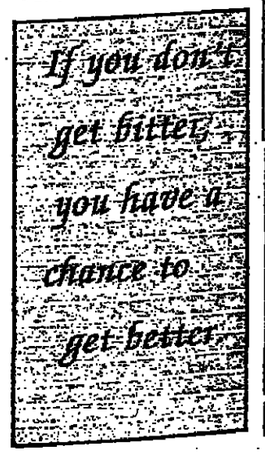
• • •

Anger would not be a bad *thing if it were not so often* misdirected.

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OFF THE WALL

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GANDY CANES AREA
ATE IAGO TOURED
HOSTEL SALAMI
BELLS DEFACED
ARCED TEARS AMO
READ BANGS AMIL
TAN RANGE EVENT
EMERALD SEAL
SALAAM TREBLE
REUBEN ABATE DOOR
ALGA CAREPHONES
SLAT EXILE DEBT
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Spoils of war are peacetime draw



The Destruction of My Lai in 1968—today a museum stands as a memorial to the tragedy

By David Lamb

CU CHI, VIETNAM—In the jungles of Tay Ninh province, rifle fire echoes through bamboo groves and Le Van Tung raises the leaf-covered lid over an underground tunnel, peering cautiously about before striding to his briefing room.

Time is frozen. Women in black pajamas walk the paths, and men in brown guerrilla uniforms and sandals snooze in hammocks. A disabled US Huey chopper, riddled with bullet holes, sits abandoned in a clearing. Nearby, Le, 45, a former Viet Cong guerrilla, taps his pointer on a huge map for attention and launches into a briefing on the military situation—as it was on this day 30 years ago.

"The American 25th Infantry Division is here," he says in English, pointing to a spot on the map two or three miles from where he is standing. "Twenty thousand Americans. They attacked every day. They knew the tunnels were here, that we lived in them, but they could never find us."

War, of course, has not returned to Cu Chi, a two-hour drive northwest of Ho Chi Minh City, formerly Saigon. The dozen visitors Le briefed on the military situation were Korean, French and American tourists, and the sounds of rifle shots came from a firing range where foreigners can shoot a US M-16 or a Soviet-made AK-47 for $2.

But even in peacetime, war can be big business. Cu Chi's 150-mile network of tunnels, dug between 1960 and 1973 and built three layers deep, have become Vietnam's most popular tourist attraction since they were opened nine years ago—and widened so Westerners could squeeze through the dark maze of narrow passageways leading to underground medical clinics, command posts, living quarters and meeting rooms.

The tunnels are part of a vast war-related cottage industry springing up throughout Vietnam. A war museum, commemorating the US Christmas bombing of Hanoi in 1972, opened in the capital in January. Street vendors do a brisk business selling toy jeeps and helicopters fashioned out of discarded Coke cans and hawking fake dog tags and counterfeit Zippo lighters engraved with military slogans like "Death is my business and business has been good."

Some Westerners wonder what message Vietnam is sending by opening the $1.4 million war museum in Hanoi and the prison that American POWs called the Hanoi Hilton just as relations with Washington are moving toward normalization. Other than wanting to generate tourist revenue, the answer is that there is no message, for the United States at least.

"We do not do this to humiliate the Americans," said Nguyen Thi Thao, curator of the museum and memorial in My Lai, where US soldiers massacred nearly 500 villagers in 1968. "We do it so that the Vietnamese will not forget, so our schoolchildren can understand the suffering of their elders and learn from history."

In general, Vietnam, which lost 3 million people from 1965 to 1975, has been more successful than the United States in letting its scars of war heal and has been more forgiving.

Forgiving, however, does not mean forgetting. Hanoi painter Le Thanh, 55, has never removed the B-52 engine that fell into his garden in 1972. "How can a nation forget its suffering?," he asks—and schoolchildren by the busloads make pilgrimages to Vietnam's war museums.

What the museums offer is selective history; Pictures—many of which first appeared in Life and other US magazines—of American POWs playing volleyball, US soldiers grinning over the corpses of Viet Cong guerrillas, napalm turning villages into crematories. They all reinforce Vietnam's self-image as the underdog triumphing over great odds.■

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

Dinosaurs of a feather

By Hank Burchard

WASHINGTON—Dinosaurs no doubt tasted a lot like chicken. We know this because chickens aren't just descendants of the dinosaurs, they — and all other birds—are in fact 'living feathered dinosaurs.'

So says Ji Qiang, director of the National Geological Museum of China, whose rapidly growing fossil collection of birdlike dinosaurs and dinosaurlike birds has overwhelmed all but the last few doubters.

Ji brought some of the latest finds to the National Geographic Society, where they'll be on exhibit through July 26. Two of the fossils were found so recently that they've never been seen outside China's Liaoning Province, where they were struck down, buried and wonderfully preserved by a volcanic eruption 120 million or more years ago. The Geographic gets to show them off first because the society has helped support the digs.

The dinobirds are featured in the July issue of National Geographic, but the two most recent discoveries missed the magazine's deadline. One is Protarchaeopteryx robusta, a feathered but portly and probably nonflying possible precursor of Archeopteryx, still regarded as the earliest known true bird. The other newcomer is Caudipteryx zoui, whose feathers are so primitive the creature could almost be called hairy.

They and the other two species on view were all roughly chicken-size, but formidable. They were fast, agile carnivores who plainly gave our teeny-weeny mammalian ancestors hell. Some had teeth, some had beaks and some had toothy beaks. One of them, Sinosauropteryx prima, whose name means "first Chinese dragon feather" had just eaten some poor little mammal when the volcano blew; the victim's jawbone is plainly visible.



None of the birdy dinosaurs or dinosaury birds can be called the 'missing link,' and no such perfect intermediary species is likely to ever turn up, because the evolution of birds was not so orderly and clear-cut as that.

There was much parallel development and many overlapping lines of descent.

"These feathered creatures certainly support the hypothesis that birds were derived directly from small theropod dinosaurs," he says. "They make the relationship between dinosaurs and birds closer and closer, but they also make the definition and concept of birds more and more indistinct."

The fossil beds in which these animals and hundreds of other species are being recovered were formed by almost-miraculous circumstances. The animals were on, over, in or around a lake, and all died within a few minutes from the volcano's poisonous gases.

Then, before they could decompose or be scavenged, they were covered by a rain of superfine ash that, when hardened to stone, retained rarely seen details such as feathers, flesh and internal organs.

One of the fossil slabs contains two female birds —"sisters, I like to think," Ji says—that were entombed together, and another has been found in which an apparently mated pair lay wing to wing as they gasped their last. But these touching scenarios lead to other thoughts: Given a slightly different course of evolution, chickens might be eating us. We should be thankful hens' teeth are so rare.■

LATimes-Washington Post News Service



Conservator Colin McGregor of the Australian Museum inspects the coffin of the Amun priest Amenhotep from around 1000 BC. The coffin of a young woman called Takhateru from about 900 BC stands to the left as McGregor prepares an exhibition of ancient Egyptian artifacts including mummies, sarcophagi, jewelry and other objects used in everyday life in one of the most significant collections outside Sydney.

AFP photo

Guns, gangsters and the business of crime

By Rich Cohen

AMERICA—For living gangsters, the stories of dead gangsters, their exploits and failures, the way they died, is the only history that really amounts to much, a history they are trying to make themselves a part of.

In New York, it is a story that begins more than 200 years ago in the Five Points and the Bowery, the toughest, most storied slums, and follows the gangs that dwelled there: the Bowery Boys; the Dead Rabbits, who were sometimes joined by Hell-Cat Maggie who filed her teeth to points; the True Blue Americans; and the Plug Uglies, who wore oversize plug hats, which, before fighting, they filled with wool and leather; the Swamp Angels; the Shirt Tails; the Patsy Conroys; and the Forty Thieves.

Early this century saw the likes of Red Rocks Farrell, Slops Connolly, Big Josh Hines and Googy Corcoran. Their pictures in police files reveal faces dark and tight, with features pressed like fingers in a fist. They were surprisingly small; 100 years ago, the average New York gangster was not more than 5ft 3in or heavier than 135lb.

When Jews began arriving in New York in numbers in the middle of the last century, they immediately encountered the gangs. On the Lower East Side, in rickety tenements, on narrow streets, in brick alleys and crowded warrens, they came face-to-face with Irish thugs. Late at night, the streets would fill with toughs. Some preyed on immigrants. Italians and Jews, who could often be tricked out of what little they had: those who could not be tricked could be bullied: those who could not be bullied or tricked could be killed.

In those days, an old immigrant would often be found in some dark alley, his skull smashed and his pockets turned out, a time-saving message to scavengers: nothing more here.

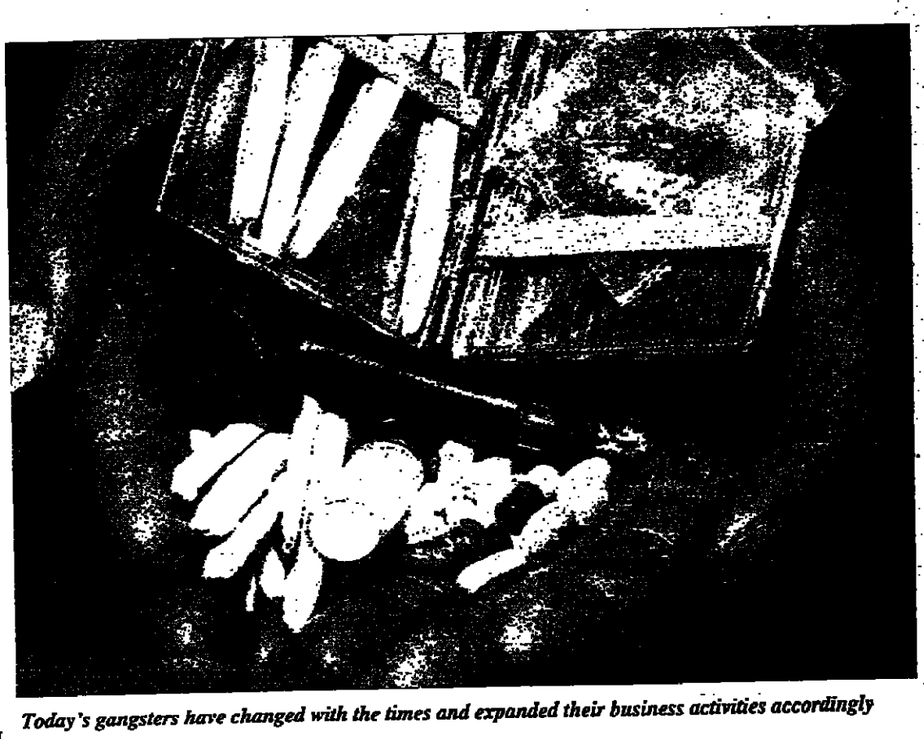
To some Jews this seemed more of the harassment they had left Europe to escape. There was a real anti-Semitism in the air but, while they were bullied, they were not confined, in a legal sense anyway, to any particular place or profession. They were free to be criminals.

And they had an advantage over Irish gangsters, many of them born in the US: they had little to lose. Nearly 2m left eastern Europe in the last two decades of the 19th century, washing up with nothing on American shores, like driftwood.

By the time many of them reached New York, they were ready to fight back. Some because they had to, for their wives and children; others because they had to, but also because they wanted to. And still others, who came from middle-class families and did not have to, because they would rather fight than go to school or work. They fought for sport.

Unlike the gangsters who came later gangsters truly of the 20th century, such as Crazy Joe Gallo and John Gotti these early figures, who often went straight from the boat to the street, were not going into a family business, not following a blazed path. Their fathers were peddlers or tailors, butchers or merchants. Here were their sons, good Jewish boys, going into crime, which must have seemed to their fathers as strange and exotic as investment banking or advertising might seem to the Gallos or Gottis todaym taking on the hard task of reinventing themselves, of creating a new identity for a new country.

Arnold Rothstein was a rich man's son, but created an identity for himself and every gangster who followed him. He grew up in a townhouse on the Upper East Side. His father, Abraham, owned a dry goods store and a cotton processing plant. When he was around 15, Arnold began slipping out of the house and heading downtown. A few minutes by train, it was like crossing into another country. He loved the card and dice games played on every corner. When he first threw a pair of dice, something magical must have happened, a flash illuminating the next 20 years: smoky rooms, late nights, laughter, bluffs, tells, codes, straights, guns, bootleggers, casinos, horses, showgirls, bets won, bets lost. Though Rothstein eventually tired of most things, he never lost his interest in gambling. It built him up in the beginning and destroyed him in the end.



Today's gangsters have changed with the times and expanded their business activities accordingly

In the autumn of 1920, the year prohibition of alcohol was introduced in the US, two small-time criminals, Waxey Gordon and Big Maxie Greenberg, approached Rothstein with a plan to get around the law. They would bring cases of whiskey by speedboat across Lake Michigan from Canada to Detroit, from where it would be smuggled across the country. They needed $175,000 to get it going and A.R. was the only gangster anyone knew with that kind of money.

After meeting on a bench in Central Park, Rothstein said he would think it over. The best gangsters act like the best businessmen: it's not their job to come up with the great discovery, the flash of inspiration. Their task is to recognise the great idea in others. See it, back it.

Sometime in the next few days, he must have realised that here was a key to the future: that by banning alcohol, the US government was turning a legitimate, multi-million dollar business over to criminals. But this new business would demand a new type of criminal, men with enough polish to move in the upper world, enough muscle to move in the lower. If things went well, organised crime would soon change from an urban menace to a great money-making American industry, such as steel, and he, Rothstein, was perhaps the only gangster in New York with the connections, money, sophistication, and intelligence to turn East Side street punks into an army of business thugs.

Rothstein saw beyond the patterns organised crime had followed until then (street brawls, gambling) to a glimmering world of gangster statesmen. He understood the truths of early 20th century capitalism and came to dominate them. Once, when a friend was in trouble, Rothstein offered the use of his lawyer, who told A.R's pal to refuse to answer questions, saying he might incriminate himself that is, stand on the Fifth Amendment of the US Constitution. This had never been tried before, and the lawyer went clear to the Supreme Court to make it law. So, in a way, A.R. created a tactic that would come to define the American gangster.

When A.R. again met Waxey and Big Maxie, he agreed to back their plan, but they would work for him. He would become the first big-time American bootlegger and they his employees. Also, they would bring in whiskey from Britain by ship, which would sit just outside US waters, where it would be met by cutters fast enough to outrun Coast Guard boats. Rothstein bought six speedboats, each to carry ashore to a warehouse in Manhattan, from where it would be sold and shipped to speakeasies and clubs. Rothstein had paid off cops all along the way. When the truck went barrelling through some lonely crossroads, the patrolman just looked the other way or settled for a bottle from the driver.

The problem wasn't the cops or the locals. It was other gangsters. Coming out of nowhere, in dark sedans and coupes, bandannas below their dark eyes, guns flashing, they would hijack the truck and make off with a few dozen cases. And who could protect A.R's product? When a smuggler is robbed, can he go to the cops? No, not really. In future, each of his trucks would head out with a driver up front and two soldiers in back, riding shotgun.

These recruits, Jewish and Italian but mostly Jewish, came from the Lower East Side. Many had come as boys from Italy or Poland or Russia, but already they were Americans. They had the pragmatism of Jews and Italians who saw that they were more alike than different, that old rivalries meant less than new money. When Irish gangs came down to beat up immigrants, young Italians and Jews fought them off together. It was the beginning of an alliance that, for many Jews, was a great part of the American experience.

And these men, growing up on the same streets, learned the same lessons: that in America it isn't enough to be strong, you also have to be smart; that in America it isn't enough to be strong and smart, you also have to play a role, making others feel that you are really just like them, only younger or older or from a different place; that people help you only when they are convinced they are really helping themselves.

In the first years of Prohibition, riding shotgun for A.R. taught you, hardened you, marked you for life. The men he hired included Meyer Lansky, Bugsy Siegel, Lucky Luciano, and Dutch Schultz, men who became the century's most notorious criminals.

"Meyer Lansky went on to become the king of illegal casino gambling," a retired New York detective once told me. "I think the first time he ever saw the green felt of a crap table was in Rothstein's place. Arnold taught Lansky about style. He was maybe the first guy to take craps off the street and put it indoors, up on a table."

But, if Rothstein led the next generation to the promised land, like Moses he could not enter.

He was shot in the stomach on 4 November 1928. He was asked to come to a hotel on 56th Street to discuss a gambling debt a few hundred thousand dollars. Small change. But A.R. refused to pay, saying he had been cheated.

He gave his gun to a friend, insisting that weapons were not allowed at such meetings. An hour later, he was found slumped over a banister in the hotel lobby. "Call me a taxi," he told the doorman. "I've been shot."

When the police asked A.R. who shot him, he waved them off, saying: "I'll take care of it." Though he had seen dozens of underworld figures fall Louie the Lump, Monk Eastman, Kid Twist Zweibach, Dopey Benny he could not believe in his own death. He spent the next few days promising to recover as he descended into delirium.

One afternoon Rothstein's estranged wife came to see him in the hospital. "I want to go home," he told her. "All I do is sleep here. I can sleep at home." He died a few hours later. The funeral was overrun by sharks and gamblers, superstitious men hoping to take away some part of A.R's magic. In front of the crowd stood Abraham Rothstein, an old man in a prayer shawl, saying Kaddish for his son.

For the most part, Rothstein's legacy was to the young criminals he had influenced. "He taught me how to dress," Lucky Luciano recalled years later. "He taught me how to not wear loud things, how to have good taste... he was the best etiquette teacher a guy could have." A.R's legacy was powerful, touching even to those who never met him, who would not make their names until much later. The connection between Rothstein and the Jewish hoods of later generations, such as Abe Reles and Buggsy Goldstein, was tenuous but real. To this day, every gangster in America, in ways they probably don't even understand, is imitating Arnold Rothstein.

Adapted from Tough Jews, Fathers, Sons and Gangster Dreams, by Rich Cohen, Jonathan Cape, £16.99.■

Financial Times Syndication

African choreography

Guy Marks goes to Senegal to learn how to talk to drums



SAMBA, A Senegalese Rasta, and Mog, an English holiday-maker, drummed together on a West African beach. The frenetic, vibrant rhythms were beaten out on a djembe, the traditional drum of the region, and an Irish drum that Mog brought with him.

Four other toubabs, as the locals referred to us whites, got up and danced at the water's edge. They danced in time to the beat a choreographed, synchronised, almost polished performance of authentic African steps. They were smiling, laughing and carefree as the waves lapped their ankles. They were caught up in the moment, the total freedom and the hedonistic pleasure, as the sun set to music over an endless ocean and miles of unspoilt sands.

The previous week none of us had even met, yet in just a few days the rhythms had taken hold of us all. We had learnt to play the African drums, learnt to let the music engulf us and to dance with strangers as though we had all been friends forever.

As I sat beneath a weeping fir tree, I recalled how I had seen the drums have this effect before. A few months ago I had witnessed 25 unsuspecting employees of British Telecom confronted with a room full of djembe drums. It was part of a management initiative in team building. There was an irony in the concept of BT managers learning to communicate with drums, but the results were extraordinary.

In just an afternoon they had learned a set piece, playing three different, complementary rhythms in unison, while a bass drum kept time and a lead drum went off on an unrelated solo. Then, as now, everyone emerged laughing, happy and fired-up by their shared experience.

In Kafountine, on the Senegalese coast, we had decided to combine a holiday with learning the drums at the Karamba school of music and dance. The first few days were difficult for everyone; plunged into an unfamiliar culture, coping with the heat, the change in diet and the lack of facilities.

We had arrived to find chaos. Modou, one of the drum teachers, was down with malaria, the toilet refused to flush, and the shower was reluctant to part with anything more than a dribble of cold well-water. Stomach upsets hit most of us immediately but, in spite of the problems, the drumming lessons got under way.

The three music teachers, Modou, Jean Marie and Sekou, were experts at a variety of different instruments. Between his bouts of malaria, Modou Diouf taught sabar and tama drums, sitting under a gingerbread plum tree in the open sandy paddock that was the school's drumming zone.

The sabar is a knee-high cylindrical drum hollowed from a trunk of teak or African rosewood. The tama is tiny by com
parison. It is a strange "talking drum", about 1ft long and shaped like an hourglass. It is held tight under one arm and the tension on the skins at either end can be varied by applying pressure to the cats-cradle of strings that hold them in place. This gives a vast range of tones as it is squeezed and played with stick and hand.

Jean Marie Keita's speciality was the djembe drum. This is a drum similar in height to the sabar, but with a different shaped shell. It is a hands-on experience, a callous-causing ring out from flat-of-hand, closed palms and spread fingers. The rhythms have evocative African names such as Souno and Doun Dounba.

The star of the school, however, was Sekou Keita. He not only taught advanced classes in djembe but seemed to be able to play just about anything when he was not dancing, larking about or helping in the kitchen.

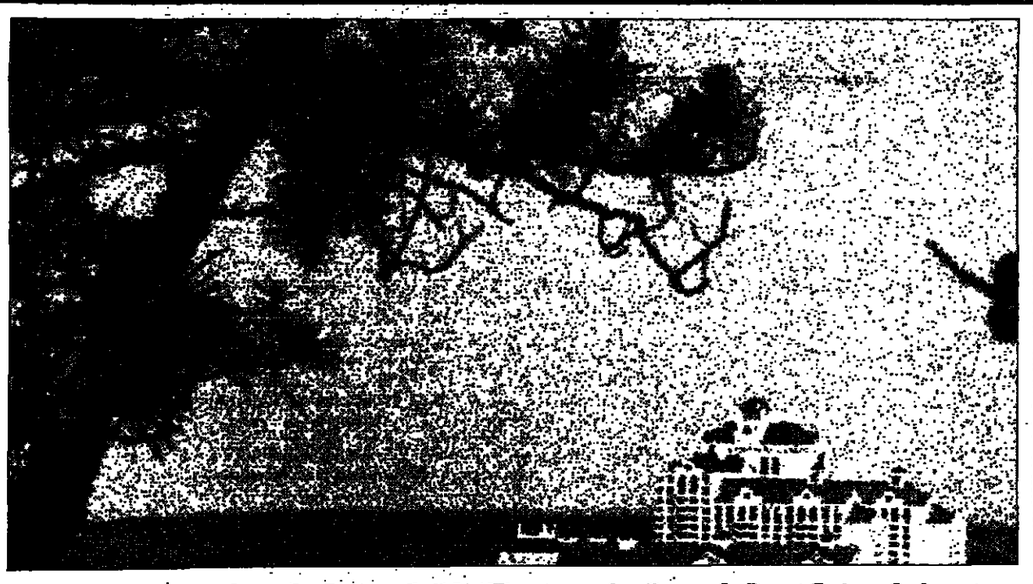
He is a master kora player, a kora being a little like a cross between a harp and a lute. I had a couple of lessons from him, but keeping different hand sequences going simultaneously was a bit like trying to pat your head and rub your tummy at the same time. I am sure it is the kind of instrument that takes years to master, but it has a wonderfully evocative twang to it and, in the hands of a professional plucking out tunes such as "Kilon Dingno", it sounded fantastic.

On the second or third day a dance teacher was called in. Mamlimbo arrived having walked the four miles or so (7km) from his home in the next village. He was the dance leader in a local troupe of "African ballet" dancers. He had a way of encouraging people to try steps that looked more like a chicken laying an egg than a dance step, and waving their arms about as though they were impersonating a windmill. When it was all put together though, it turned out to be an authentic African dance full of movement and rhythmic animation.

There was no stopping them. They taught music and dance by day and in the evenings they were joined by visiting musicians to perform in the casa rond, the palm-thatched, umbrella-roofed dining area that formed the heart of the compound. On a couple of nights there were visiting dance troupes and the performance was on a grander scale, on an open-air stage. People came in from the village to see them, jumping up on the platform to join in the fun.

A week had passed: a week of early morning dance classes interrupted by mad dashes to the lavatory, mid-morning sabar lessons, djembe in the afternoons, quiet moments of kora practice that led into evenings relaxing on the beach. For people so caught up in the rhythms of an off-beat holiday, the beach was just another opportunity to dance and play music with the locals. When the sun sank, the session ended, but we had fish and rice to look forward to back at the compound, an evening performance by smoke-soothed drummers and still another week to go.■

Financial Times



Casino Pequot: The Mashantucket Pequot tribe's 3-million-square-foot Foxwoods Resort Casino - the largest casino in North America - soars over the reservation near Preston, Conn. Photo By Sean D. Elliot.

Rising tide laps evolution's islands

Raymond Colitt worries about the future of some of the world's oldest and most mystical mountains

RISING OMINOUSLY out of nature's colour puzzle are South America's mystical tepuis or table mountains, which are believed to have been formed 1.5bn-2bn years ago during the Precambrian period, making them some of earth's oldest rock formations.

Towering above dusty savannah or dense jungle, they mark what is likely to have been the original junction between South America and Africa, the supercontinent of Gondwana. Indeed, the tepuis consist of similar material to the cliffs and mesa-like mountains in western Sahara.

The site is south-eastern Venezuela's Canaima National Park, one of the world's largest and with an area equal to that of Belgium. It is where the Great Savannah meets the north-eastern edge of the vast Amazon rainforest in a riot of exotic vegetation. Viewed from above, open grassland blends with high-altitude, evergreen and cloud forests merge into a mosaic of deep olive and shades of arid brown. Jagged and colossal, the tepuis have a mystical air, heavy with prehistoric, magical images. At 2,772 metres above sea level, the highest is Mount Roraima, cradling the borders of Venezuela, Brazil and Guyana.

Exposed to erosion by rain, wind, algae and fungi, the tepuis have taken on bizarre shapes. The twisted rock formations on their surface resemble a lunar landscape, conjuring up images of ancient civilisations or dinosaurs fossilised with time, or of strange forces at work. Canaima, the name of the park, means "spirit of evil" in the language of the Pemon, the principal native group living in the region.

Tepuis are true islands in time, some of the few places on earth where the flora and fauna have grown for aeons without outside influence. Plants and animals have evolved to suit the inhospitable climate of the often soilless, windswept plateaus, pounded by torrential downpours. Notorious are the puri-puri insects, which, despite their endearing name, may well be the planet's most bloodthirsty creatures. Nearly invisible to the eye, they are known to have driven the unprepared visitor insane.

The British novelist Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was inspired by the landscape without ever having been there. The travel tales of a British botanist returning from Venezuela to London, formed the basis for Doyle's The Lost World, published in 1912, which describes the ascent of a fictitious mountain inhabited by prehistoric plants and dinosaurs.

A passage from it describes one of the countless rivers nourished by the tepuis and eventually draining into the mighty Orinoco:

"For a fairyland it was the most wonderful that the imagination of man could conceive. The thick vegetation met overhead, interlacing into a natural pergola, and through this tunnel of verdure in a golden twilight flowed the green, pellucid river, beautiful in itself, but marvellous from the strange tints thrown by the vivid light from above filtered and tempered in its fall. Clear as crystal, motionless as a sheet of glass, green as the edge of an iceberg, it stretched in front of us under its leafy archway, every stroke of our paddles sending a thousand ripples across its shining surface. It was a fitting avenue to a land of wonders."

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The gem of the park is Angel Falls, the world's highest uninterrupted waterfall, dropping nearly 1,000 metres. It is named after Jimmy Angel, an intrepid US pilot and adventurer who, in 1935, landed on top of the tepui despite protests from the gold-prospecting customers accompanying him. The Auyan tepui is so large, that its rainfall and moisture are enough to feed Angel Falls all year long. When the peak of the Auyan tepui is wrapped in haze, the water appears to fall straight from the sky, releasing a cloud of mist and crashing thunderously on the rocks below. Yet only a few hundred metres downstream a natural pool allows the visitor an angelic bath after the half-hour walk uphill to the base of the cataract. A trip down the Churun River, which gives access to the falls, is an open window on native life. Pemon Indian women crouch on the bank washing clothes before their thatched huts. Others grate manioc, which is later processed into cassava bread or a fermented drink. A group of men fish in a tributary half concealed amid the towering reeds. From deep within the rainforest the roar of a band of howler monkeys reverberates around the vast bare rock wall of the Topochi tepui, as the rising sun begins to burn away the early morning mist.

Yet the idyllic scenery and tranquillity are deceiving. The shimmering alluvial gold deposits that attracted Jimmy Angel decades ago, still draw modern-day conquistadors to explore the subsoil of the Guyana Shield, South America's oldest rock foundation. Miners and lumber men are encroaching on the boundaries of the park, destroying the forest and poisoning the rivers with mercury, threatening the survival of the native peoples and that of the flora and fauna. Canaima itself is known to have vast gold and diamond deposits, and the few park guards are poorly paid and equipped to fend off wildcat miners.

Tourism, a newly paved road, and the burning of the forest by the region's expanding indigenous population pile pressure on the park's natural resources. This is forcing officials to rewrite regulations for the eastern half. The new plan foresees training and recruiting natives as park guards to help patrol the area and improve the dialogue with the native population at large. The idea is not to ban tourism or agriculture entirely but to regulate the activities in such a way as to offer an alternative source of income while minimising the environmental impact.

"We used to think of national parks as an island that could be protected in isolation," says Jose Anibal Invernon, philosophy is a more integral approach that includes community participation and the park's financial self-sufficiency."

Some of the natives recognise the need for environmental protection measures and are willing to participate. Yet "it is an extremely delicate and difficult job," says Invernon. "You are trying to respect their tradition while preserving their future." Many natives in this land of magic and mystique continue to believe that the majestic tepuis are the guardians of the savannah. "It is where the great spirit lives," says an elderly Pemon man, pointing to the top of Auyan tepui, where Angel Falls and a frail rainbow disappear into a lofty cloud.■

Financial Times Syndication

Attila leads the fun in the vineyards

Giles MacDonogh on the wines that withstood invasion and socialism



THERE IS an indulgent sensuality about the Hungarians, and not even four decades of Russian socialism was quite able to rid them of their enjoyment of the good things in life. Fewer than 10 years after the regime came to an undignified end, Hungary still sports many of the grimmer features it acquired during those days: drab housing blocks; power stations crowning the hills; pylons making an unwelcome addition to many views. Yet push through the door and there is an old Hungary taking its finery out of storage.

Push through the door is precisely what I did in Budapest. Hungry and footsore, I glimpsed a delightful interior filled with Gothic vaults, stencils and wall-paintings and heard the unmistakable tones of a gypsy band. This was the restaurant Karpatia. Until a few months ago it was another state-owned tourist trap, now it is in private hands again and is well worth another look.

I was seated under a scene of furious Magyars slaughtering Turks, and presented with some fat goose liver and a glass of dry Tokay szamorodni. Spicy fish soup came next: then veal cooked in dry Tokay with fresh grapes; and a layered pancake filled with nuts and covered with a strawberry sauce.

Invigorated by Karpatia, I left for the country on a wine tour. Our guide was Attila. It seems that Hungarians see no harm in baptising their children with the name of this byword for barbarism. More remarkable in this instance, was that just like the more famous Hun, our Attila was married to an Ildiko.

Attila looked embarrassed, but added: "I suppose it was fate." Our Attila was a sommelier, and few could rival his knowledge of Hungary's budding wine scene. I have reservations, though, about his historical knowledge.

Across the old Iron Curtain, history was considered part of the ideological armoury of communism. Some of the stories which came over the microphone, while we travelled from wine to wine, were hand-me-downs from the old regime. The fact that the Hungarian Revolution of 1848 had been put down by the Russians, rather than the hated Austrians, was presumably not taught in schools before 1989.

Ideology was coloured by intense nationalism. Hungarians were responsible for everything good in this world. The Turks and the Austrians had done nothing but bleed the country white. Attila even rewrote Austrian history, to have the Turks impale a croissant on the spire of St Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna. When I mildly remonstrated, adding they had been repulsed, twice, Attila was beside himself with fury: "That's not true," he said.

Communism had rolled up the more profitable vineyards and redeposited them in the productive plains: quantity not quality was the primary consideration. Our first stop had been just too small to concern them. Somlo is a volcanic knoll which rises from the plain to the north of Lake Balaton. There, with the help of grape varieties such as the Juhfark and the Furmint, growers such as Bela Fekete and Istvan Inhauser make individual dry, white wines, high in natural acid which age extremely well.

Lake Balaton itself was a victim of communist homes, wiping out the best vineyards on the slopes of the south-facing north bank. Chiefly East German tourists were installed in the plentiful spa hotels, where they slurped the semi-sweet wines which formed the bulk of production.

Newly independent wineries, such as St Donatus in Balatonlelle, are making an effort to dispel that image of cheap cheerfulness. Already the area is being scoured by English supermarkets which are branding the wines with bogus, patronising English names. It is hard to say if that is a real improvement.

Much more impressive has been the progress made in some of the less touristic regions. Villany-Siklos' most famous vineyard is called the "Jammertal", or "valley of lamentation", because of the wailing of the Turks who were butchered there. The German name was applied by the largely German population who settled in Villany.

Even now the best grower is a Joszef Bock. Sadly he already charges realistic prices for his first-rate wines, so it is unlikely that they will snapped up by any British multiples.

"Bikaver" or "bulls' blood" is Hungary's most famous red wine. Its reputation took a fearful tumble during communist times when any old vinous soup flowed out of the fermenting vats. The most famous Bikaver comes from Eger in the north-east, but there is another produced in Szekszard in the south. Here we met the Vesztergombis, who have revived the Kadarka grape which was once considered an essential ingredient of Bikaver. It is combined with Kekfrankos (Blaufrankisch). Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon to make one of Hungary's most exciting reds. The Vesztergombis Merlots and Cabernets are not to be disdained either.

Eger is an old town which has been the home of much revisionism, not least up at the castle, which was the scene of bloody resistance to the Turk. The existing edifice dates from the beginning of this century. It was rebuilt as part of the national "awakening". That battle, by the way, is said to have been the origin of the name "bulls' blood": as the Turks believed that only such a meaty beverage could have given the Magyars the power to resist them.

If you want the real Bulls' Blood of Eger today, you must go to Tibor Gal. Gal achieved fame by making Ornellaia, the fabulously sought after and more impressively priced "super-Tuscan". He never lost sight of his native Eger, however. Now, with his expanding estate, Gal is in an excellent position to demonstrate the potential of Hungarian wines.

Gal's international dimension makes him a shrewd observer, too. "The vine is a very political plant," he says, "it feels the atmosphere around it." In his view, it was not possible to achieve greatness under the old regime. Some would dispute that and point to Tokay, which never lost its reputation during those years. Now the huge cooperative has been carved up, and no vineyard area in Hungary can boast the degree of foreign investment to be found in those misty hills.

In Britain, the most famous figure in modern Tokay is Hugh Johnson, who heads the Royal Tokay Company in Mad. Like most of the other new companies, Royal Tokay has turned away from the oxidised style which used to reign there and laid the emphasis on fruit flavours. Royal Tokay also keeps the alcohol low, making wines of intense sweetness, a bit like German Beeren—and Trockenbeerenauslesen. The French company Diznoko also avoids the sherry-like oxidation of the past, but lets the wine ferment more. Their wines are more like Sauternes. The Spanish concern, Oremus, is less ashamed of old-style Tokay. It has considerable pre-1989 stocks, including some wonderful, traditional wines from the 1970s.

It had been a splendid opportunity to see where Hungary was going and to feel the buzz of a land where all is in flux. We were promised a further treat: Gundel, Budapest's most famous restaurant which was created by Karoly Gundel, the Escoffier of Hungarian cooking. Its new, Hungaro-American owners had poured money into the operation producing a gastronomic temple which would not look at all out of place in Paris.

Sadly, the meal proved unequal to the surroundings, but my eyes were feasted at least. These are early days: the rest can come later.■

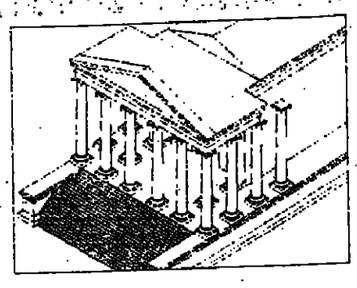
Financial Times Syndication

Le Jourdain

Supplément en français du Star

Le temple romain d'Amman, une baudruche archéologique

par Véronique Abu-Nijmeh



Les difficultés économiques d'une société ont régulièrement des répercussions néfastes sur les domaines de l'art et de l'architecture, qui s'en trouvent appauvris. Sur la Citadelle d'Amman, le grand temple romain n'a su tromper les archéologues : sa magnificence présumée a toujours été fallacieuse. Vers 163 ap. J. C. alors qu'à Jérash, on érige le complexe grandiose du sanctuaire d'Artémis, les constructeurs de Philadelphie ont bien envie d'offrir à leur cité un édifice de grande allure. Mais voilà, la situation économique est déplorable (on en ignore les raisons), ressources et matériel font défaut. Toutes les astuces sont alors mises en œuvre pour produire le meilleur effet possible au moindre coût : le portique qui délimite l'enceinte sacrée du sanctuaire est réduit à une simple colonnade, alors qu'on devrait construire une galerie pour accueillir des boutiques. Afin que le temple paraisse plus imposant, la colonnade est abaissée à cinq mètres. On omet de niveler le sol de l'enceinte en terrasse plane. Les bâtisseurs concentrent leur attention sur la façade de l'édifice : on élargit l'espacement des colonnes de front et l'on rétrécit celui des colonnes latérales, ce qui donne l'illusion de colonnades fournies sur les côtés du temple alors qu'elles s'interrompent à leur quatrième élément. En effet, avec ses flancs dénudés (voir plan ci-contre), le temple est réduit à sa plus simple expression : une base, une entrée soutenue par des colonnes et une salle fermée. Enfin maints détails décoratifs bâclés trahissent une main d'œuvre négligente. À la faveur du temps qui a renversé l'imposture de sa silhouette, le temple d'Hérakles, qui ne fut d'ailleurs jamais achevé, peut aujourd'hui exhiber fièrement ses trois colonnes aux visiteurs peu avertis. ●

Éclaboussures

Cri d'alarme

Une jeune fille se jette dans un puits. Elle n'a pas été la première de sa classe».

«Un garçon de 18 ans a tué de sang-froid toute sa famille pour d'obscures encore indéterminées».

«Un autre monte dans un bus. Il s'approche de son amie et l'abat d'un coup de feu avant de se suicider. Sa famille avait refusé qu'il se marie avec elle».

«Un jeune homme de 17 ans tue un vieillard d'un coup de couteau pour 180 JD».

Des faits divers tragiques, les drames d'un dossier noir qui s'épaissit de jour en jour. Que se passe-t-il dans notre société ? Sous la pression collective, les familles sont devenues les véhicules de la terreur dans l'éducation des enfants. Et les pères et les mères sont comme des chats qui avalent leurs petits sous prétexte de les protéger des dangers extérieurs. Dans un environnement au climat délétère, les jeunes se retrouvent frustrés, en but à l'exclusion. Il faut bien avouer que sans emploi, certains d'entre eux ont édifié la violence pour lutter contre l'injustice. Cette violence aujourd'hui en progression - leur cri d'alarme- exprime comme un refus de se laisser mourir, comme un désir d'exister souvent exacerbé par le besoin d'argent facile ou de vengeance. Quelques quartiers défavorisés dans les grandes agglomérations sont ainsi devenus des espaces revendiqués par les jeunes comme des territoires réservés, des ghettos où personne n'ose pénétrer à la nuit tombée. Ils se rendent compte alors qu'ils propagent la peur jusqu'à en éprouver une certaine jouissance : sentiment de la domination et du pouvoir.

Mais qu'est-ce qui provoque le passage à l'acte de violence ? Pour ces jeunes coupés de leurs parents, de leur généalogie, les valeurs humaines et en particulier le respect de la vie n'ont plus de signification. La notion de sanction est sans effet sur eux. Sans repères, ils agressent aveuglément juste pour évaluer la portée de leur geste. Dans ce domaine d'ailleurs, la justice est mal appliquée. Elle est aux prises avec un phénomène social nouveau qu'elle n'a pas encore intégré. La plupart du temps, les jeunes délinquants sont ramassés par la police et relâchés quelques mois plus tard. Mais leur séjour en prison s'avère presque toujours inutile : pas de réel programme de rééducation : pas de volonté de les aider à réintégrer une vie plus citoyenne. Selon les études du ministère des affaires sociales, 55% des délinquants récidivent à leur sortie de prison.

Il s'agit aujourd'hui de se mettre autour d'une table pour combattre la violence urbaine et la délinquance juvénile : casser l'exclusion des jeunes, qu'ils prennent conscience de la gravité de leurs actes dans un premier temps puis essayer de les resocialiser. Enfin nous devons lutter contre la démission des parents qui permettent à leurs fils de rester dehors toute la journée à partir du moment où ils ramènent quelques menues ressources le soir à la maison. Première victime des mauvais comportements des jeunes, la famille doit être responsabilisée selon le principe suivant : si ton fils fait une bêtise, alors tu paies les pots cassés. ■

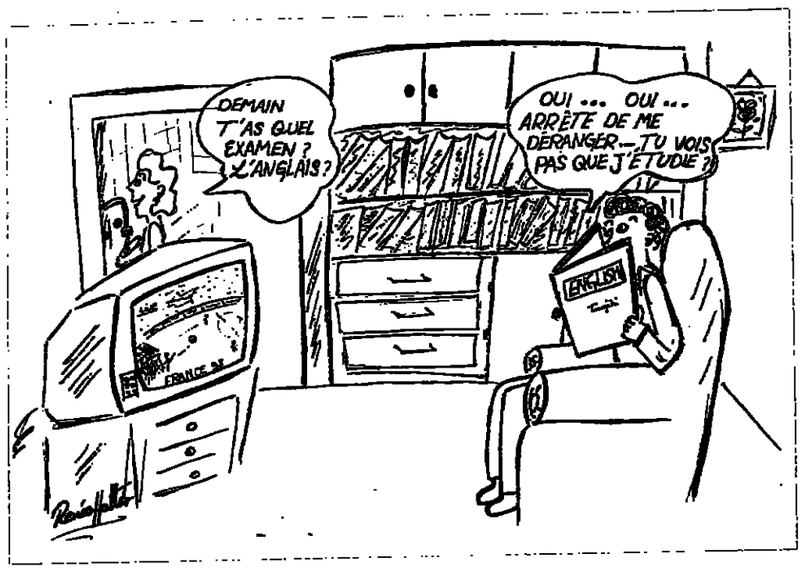
Youssef Abu Saleh

D'un cours à l'autre

Éducation

Tawjihi : le retour du père fouettard

Les épreuves viennent de s'achever et l'angoisse saisit des dizaines de milliers de lycéens dans l'attente des résultats. Soixante-quatre ans après sa création, cet examen sème plus que jamais la terreur. Témoignages.



Le tawjihi *n'est qu'une guerre des nerfs. Pendant le premier semestre, j'étudiais avec plaisir. Je n'éprouvais pas de pression mais à l'approche des examens j'ai vu l'angoisse sur les visages de mes camarades et des membres de ma famille. J'avais l'impression de ne pas être normale si je ne paniquais pas».* Un témoignage parmi bien d'autres qui illustre l'ampleur des dégâts. Chaque année, le tawjihi envahit les foyers de près de 100.000 jeunes gens, promettant l'angoisse et la dépression.

Les lycéens sont nombreux à penser que c'est surtout une question sociale. Les parents exercent une forte pression sur leurs enfants pour qu'ils réussissent aussi bien que leurs cousins et pour des raisons de fierté familiale. Car une famille avec beaucoup de diplômés (chômeurs ou travailleurs) a une bonne image dans la société. Khaled Dawani : *«J'ai deux petites sœurs et je suis le seul garçon. Toute la famille attend mon succès. Après chaque examen, on reçoit pas moins de dix coups de fil de toute la Jordanie, juste pour savoir comment cela s'est passé. Pour m'en débarrasser, je leur dis que j'ai raté pour ne pas qu'ils s'attendent à un bon résultat».*

Parfois, la réussite au tawjihi peut décider de l'avenir de la famille : *«On veut que je prenne la suite du business de mon père et de mes oncles. On me dit : «tu dois nous rendre fiers». On me fait sentir que, selon mes résultats, je serai le sauveur ou la honte de la famille. Mon oncle le plus âgé fait pression sur mon père qui se reporte ensuite sur moi»*, raconte Ibrahim Haddad, très lucide.

De son côté, Tareq Batikhi explique en rigolant qu'il est *«la dernière chance de sa famille pour effacer la honte de l'échec»* de son frère aîné.

Afin de pousser l'adolescent à étudier, les parents pratiquent souvent la bâton ou la carotte ou les deux alternativement. D'un côté, on offre à l'enfant les meilleures conditions morales et physiques pour bien préparer les épreuves et on promet un joli cadeau en cas de succès. «Mon père m'achètera une petite voiture pour aller à l'université si j'ai de bons résultats», témoigne joyeusement Fadia Hijazi. *«On essaie d'offrir un bon environnement pour que Fadia se concentre sur ses études*, assure une mère attentionnée, *on reçoit moins de visites et ses frères vont regarder la Coupe du monde chez des copains. Malgré cela, elle reste quand même perturbée. La compétition a influencé son amitié avec sa copine d'enfance. Cela la touche beaucoup».* De l'autre côté, on utilise les menaces ou même les mauvais traitements : *«J'ai passé l'arabe et les maths mais c'était catastrophique*, raconte un candidat, *j'ai refusé alors d'aller à l'examen suivant. Mes parents m'ont jeté dehors sans ménagement».*

Tous ces comportements excessifs sont liés à l'enjeu de l'examen. Ces deux dernières années, moins de la moitié des élèves a obtenu son tawjihi. Et encore ce diplôme se révèle bien souvent inutile pour continuer des études supérieures. Le *wasta* mis à part, ceux qui ont les meilleures notes sont les premiers servis dans les universités. Les autres se partagent le reste et servent bien souvent de bouche-trous dans des sections qu'ils n'ont même pas choisies.

Entre la réputation de la famille et leur avenir, les élèves subissent donc un pressurage qui n'est pas sans conséquence. *«Au cours de l'année, j'ai pris cinq kilos en plus. Je mangeais tout le temps et pourtant je restais toute pâle»*, se souvient Hala Zraikat. Insomnie, maladies, faiblesses passagères, tabagisme voire tentatives de suicide sont le lot de nombreux candidats. Mohammad Zaghlawan a failli être l'une des victimes de la démesure : *«Un mois avant les examens, j'étais très déprimé car j'avais trop de matières à réviser et je ne pouvais plus rattraper mon retard. J'était totalement effondré alors j'ai essayé de me tuer avec le revolver de mon père mais ma sœur m'a arrêté à temps. À ce moment-là, je n'avais pas peur, je me foutais de tout, même de ma vie».*

Trop de par c˙ur

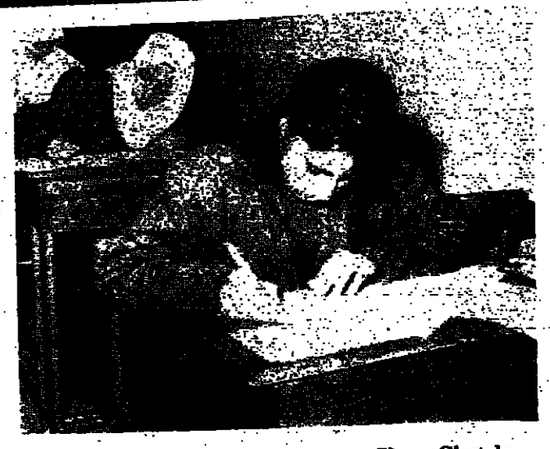
Par ailleurs, le système éducatif se trouve face à un paradoxe qui semble aujourd'hui insurmontable : le chômage touche presque l'ensemble des diplômés. En fait, il n'y a pas d'adéquation entre les diplômes délivrés à l'Université et la réalité du marché du travail. Certains responsables du Ministère de l'éducation avouent qu'il y a trop d'étudiants dans les sections littéraires, juridiques et des sciences sociales et un développement insuffisant des cursus scientifiques.

«Ça sert à quoi le diplôme ?», interroge brutalement Mohammad, *mon frère a un Masters en ingénierie et il est sans travail. Alors pourquoi me faire croire que le résultat du tawjihi est la clé de mon bonheur ? Un jour de dispute avec ma mère à propos des études, j'ai pris un taxi dont le chauffeur avait mis son diplôme d'avocat au-dessus du compteur».* Tareq va plus loin : *«Le diplôme, cela ne me dit absolument rien. C'est l'argent qui ouvre les portes ici. Je suis fait pour le commerce, pas pour apprendre des choses par cœur».*

Pour les professeurs, ce sont les programmes trop lourds et de mauvaise qualité qui sont les vrais coupables. *«Le livre de chimie a triplé de volume»*, s'indigne Bshara Innab, un professeur de chimie. Manhal Haddadin, professeur d'histoire, estime que *«la présentation des informations n'incite pas à apprendre. L'histoire, par nature, est une matière sèche si on ne la relie pas à la vie d'aujourd'hui».* Plus généralement, ce professeur regrette que le tawjihi ne soit qu'un test de mémoire : *«On ne recherche pas la réflexion des élèves, c'est du mot à mot».* Ainsi de bons étudiants au lycée peuvent se retrouver en situation d'échec à la fac.

Une réforme du tawjihi s'avère donc indispensable. Certains enseignants parlent carrément de le supprimer et de le remplacer par des examens à l'entrée de l'université. D'autres penchent pour un contrôle continu sur un ou deux ans. En tout cas, parents, élèves et professeurs se retrouvent pour demander une modification radicale d'un système archaïque qui n'est plus adapté à la modernité du monde actuel. ■

Aline Mango



«On ne recherche pas la réflexion des élèves. C'est du mot à mot». *Un professeur d'histoire.*

Le baccalauréat, une institution indéboulonnable

Cr en 1808 par Napoléon, le baccalauréat, nom dérivé du latin (de *bacca lauri*, baie de laurier, dont on paraît à Rome les vainqueurs) n'est pas seulement la sanction des études secondaires et la clé de l'entrée à l'université. C'est aussi un mythe, une des institutions républicaines majeures de la France, une grand-messe annuelle de la Nation.

Sauf qu'en bientôt deux siècles, tout ou presque a changé, à tel point que, quand on évoque le bac sur une longue période, on peut se demander si on parle de la même chose. D'un examen d'élite (la première promotion de 1809 ne comptait que 32 bacheliers) à deux étages (bac de première et bac de terminale) et à destination de la classe bourgeoise, on est en effet passé à un seul examen de masse concernant, en 1997, pas moins de 482.000 élèves. Et son rôle social a changé. Qui inscrirait encore, comme il était fréquent de le faire au XIXème siècle, sur sa carte de visite, la mention de «bachelier» ? C'est qu'à cette époque, ce n'était rien d'avoir le bac ! Jusqu'aux années 40, on peut même dire qu'il était une sorte de [illegible] sies, ouvrant à notre détenteur la perspective d'une carrière de notable. Avec sa démocratisation (61% des jeunes d'une classe d'âge décrochent aujourd'hui leur bac contre 4% à la libération), il ne reste plus grand-chose de ce statut. Simple rite de passage à l'âge adulte, sur le chemin [illegible] ; au mieux, il permet d'évoluer lentement, pour le meilleur et pour le pire... ■



Les résultats sont affichés. Jour d'angoisse pour les élèves.

Avec l'aide du magazine *Ça m'intéresse*

Le Moyen-orient dans la presse française

Grand Jérusalem : le «pari dangereux» de Netanyahou



Malgr la Coupe du monde, la Moyen-Orient a obtenu une place non négligeable dans la presse française de la fin juin. Le projet d'un «Grand Jérusalem» du Premier ministre israélien Benjamin Netanyahou était bien sûr l'un des sujets-phares dans l'actualité proche-orientale traitée. Dans son édition du 25 juin, l'hebdomadaire *Le Point* y consacre un article dans lequel le journaliste estime que Bibi est *«passé maître dans l'art de brouiller les pistes»*. Quant aux Palestiniens, *«ils soupçonnent Netanyahou de rechercher, par petites touches, à vider les accords d'Oslo de leur substance tout en affirmant aux Américains vouloir les appliquer»*. Le journaliste termine son article en mettant en garde contre la reprise du terrorisme et qualifie de *«dangereux»* le *«pari»* de Netanyahou. *Le Monde*, dans sa sélection hebdomadaire du 27 jui, reprend largement ce thème dans un article plutôt critique.

Dans son éditorial, le mensuel France Pays Arabes, édition du mois de juin, se demande si *«Israël est un État intouchable»* ou un État comme les autres. L'auteur, Lucien Bitterlin, détaille les écarts de la politique de Benjamin Netanyahou, notamment le refus de l'appel à la paix lancé communément par les présidents Chirac et Moubarak. Au total, une «outrecuidance» israélienne qui commence à agacer les États-Unis.

Loin de la politique, *le magazine des Français expatriés* (juin 98) propose une enquête sur la vie dans les Émirats arabes unis. L'article vante un environnement politique et économique attrayant et *«une présence française de plus en plus importante»* avec l'implantation d'entreprises qui *«bénéficient d'un cadre juridique et fiscal très favorable»*. Dans un entretien, un couple de Français confirme les nombreux avantages de ce pays comme *«la non-imposition, un climat agréable, une communauté française nombreuse et des femmes qui vivent comme en France sans avoir besoin de se voiler»*. Seul point noir selon les interviewés, la réglementation de l'alcool qui *«se trouve dans des points de vente précis»*. ■

Revue de presse par Nahed Al-Khlouf



Les Émirats arabes unis séduisent les Français.

Relations bilatérales

Depuis 1974, des Japonais très généreux

Les échanges politiques autour du processus de paix sont accaparés par les États-Unis et l'Europe. Les Japonais ont choisi plutôt la discrétion de l'argent pour assurer la stabilité de la région, et tout d'abord en Jordanie.

Les relations entre le Japon et la Jordanie ont commencé en 1974 avec la mise en place de leurs ambassades. Quelques mois avant l'arrivée de la première entreprise japonaise à Amman, Mitsubishi, un contructeur automobile bien entendu.

Dès ce moment, le pays du soleil levant a commencé de proposer des aides financières au royaume hachémite. L'assistance japonaise s'effectue sous trois formes :

- **des emprunts à long terme** dont la Jordanie doit s'acquitter sur 30 ans avec un intérêt très faible (2,7%) et qui permettent de soutenir la balance des paiements. Depuis 1974, le montant de ces prêts a atteint 1 million de JD.
- **des dons** qui s'élèvent à plus de 72 millions de JD depuis 1979. Le secteur de l'environnement a ainsi obtenu récemment un «cadeau» de 5,4 millions de dollars pour lutter contre la pollution dans le Golfe d'Aqaba et un don de 11 millions de dollars afin d'équiper 10 mairies pour le ramassage des ordures
- **des aides techniques**, notamment dans le domaine de la santé pour un total de 66 millions de JD aujourd'hui.

Au bout du compte, le Japon est devenu le premier donateur de la Jordanie au coude à coude avec les États-Unis pour une addition totale qui approche les 1,3 milliards de dinars.

Les autorités japonaises avancent d'abord des raisons plus ou moins factices pour expliquer leur générosité : aide à un pays sous-développé, au même titre qu'à certains pays d'Afrique comme le Cameroun ou le Ghana, bonnes relations entre les deux familles royales. Le responsable économique de l'ambassade du Japon en Jordanie finit tout de même par être plus précis. Le Japon n'est pas le premier donateur dans l'ensemble du Tiers-monde. Le royaume hachémite représente, à cet égard, une notable exception qui appelle une justification.

«La stabilité économique et politique du Japon est liée à celle du Moyen-Orient, explique M. Tanaka, *notre pays surveille de près tout ce qui peut troubler la sécurité et notamment la stabilité du prix du pétrole. En retour, cette stabilité est une sécurité pour le Japon».* L'empire nippon dépend en effet largement du Moyen-Orient en matière de ressources pétrolières. Logiquement, elle a donc décidé de protéger son économie énergétique en s'appuyant sur un pays aussi central dans la région que la Jordanie, un modèle de permanence dont le monarque a choisi depuis longtemps la carte de la paix. Le gouvernement japonais a donc assisté le royaume hachémite dans la restauration du pont Sheikh Hussein qui relie la Jordanie à sa rive occidentale pour un montant de 7,7 millions de dollars. Par ailleurs, le Japon, comme toute grande puissance qui se respecte, s'est engagé pour 500.000 dollars à soutenir des projets culturels et éducatifs en terre jordanienne : programmes télévisés, échanges de savoirs, enseignement de la langue japonaise à l'université. Autant de liens qui rendent ce pays lointain et mystérieux plus proche des Jordaniens. ■

Nasrine A. Sheikh



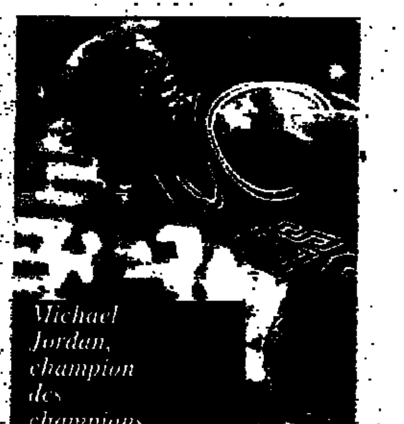
Signature entre l'Ambassade du Japon et une association de charité. Depuis 1979, les dons japonais à la Jordanie s'élèvent à plus de 72 millions de JD.

Le mot de la semaine

«CHAMPION»

À plusieurs égards, le sport et particulièrement le football, se pose en substitut de la guerre. En atteste le vocabulaire belliqueux emprunté à ce registre : s'affronter, attaquer, écraser, remporter la victoire, défaite etc. Reste un mot dont l'origine guerrière nous échappe : c'est champion. Le latin campus dont il est issu désigne la plaine, le champ libre, la rase campagne. Il a donné lieu, entre autres, à tout un vocabulaire bucolique, tel que champêtre, campagnard, champignon... Dans un contexte militaire, campus est la plaine où s'affrontent les armées. Il faut ensuite se tourner vers l'allemand médiéval kempjo pour voir cette racine prendre une connotation juridique : kempjo est alors une personne qui combat en champ clos (arène, carrière) mais pour l'intérêt d'un autre, en référence aux tournois de chevalerie. Dans certains emplois, il finit même par désigner celui qui soutient une cause. De l'allemand médiéval, kempjo a évolué vers l'allemand moderne kampf, qui signifie simplement le combat. Il est passé en français sous la forme champion qui aujourd'hui encore est d'abord synonyme de tenant, partisan, adepte, défenseur, sens qui peut s'employer dans le domaine juridique, guerrier ou sportif. Ensuite il signifie le concurrent. Et c'est seulement en troisième position que l'on trouve athlète de grande valeur, vainqueur, acceptation désormais la plus répandue. ■

Véronique Abu-Nijmeh



Michael Jordan, champion des champions.

C'est la vie

L'agenda français d'Amman

Cinéma

Cycle consacré aux sourires du cinéma français.
Boudu sauvé des eaux, film de 1932 en noir et blanc, sous-titré en arabe avec Michel Simon.
Un clauchard, sauvé du suicide par un libraire parisien, devient l'amant de sa femme et de sa bonne.
Lundi 6 juillet au Centre culturel français à 18h30 et 20h30. Renseignements au CCF au 4636445 ou 4637009.

Théâtre

Quatre heures à Chatila, une pièce adaptée et mise en scène d'après le texte de Jean Genet qui visita le camp juste après la tragédie. **A Darat Al Funun, ce jeudi 2 juillet à partir de 21h.**

Exposition

De très belles pages ont été écrites sur le sport. De Honoré de Balzac à Georges Pérec en passant par Victor Hugo, l'exposition **«Sport et littérature»** et ses 22 affiches nous en présentent les principales réalisations. **Du 8 au 30 juillet au CCF.**

Les Jordaniens derrière leur écran

«Dieu est de notre côté»

Après beaucoup d'hésitations, la décision est prise. Des filles dans le Balad, c'est possible, mais accompagnées d'un chaperon. Notre mission : aller voir le premier huitième de finale du Mondial entre l'Italie et la Norvège dans un café du centre-ville. Que choisir ? Deux filles, un garçon, plusieurs possibilités. Tandis que nous, garçons [illegible], notre chaperon se prononce pour le *Kawkab Al-Charq*, [illegible] hommage à Oum Kalsoum, la célèbre chanteuse égyptienne dont il est un fidèle [illegible]. [illegible] *la Coin du [illegible] (Bika Al-Rashid)* [illegible] connu des touristes [illegible] l'éco-touristique. Deux contre un. La majorité l'emporte. Va pour la grande pompe du Calife. Le café et ses fameux drapeaux colorés se trouvent à l'étage d'un vieux bâtiment de 1924, en face de la Banque arabe centrale. En haut de l'escalier, 35 petits mètres carrés font office de cour [illegible] une salle coupée en deux prolongée par la terrasse. Dans la première partie, trois hommes isolés sont assis sur la seule table de la pièce et poussent les pions d'un *tawlet zahr*. Toute l'action se passe dans la deuxième partie. Une vingtaine d'hommes y sont assis comme dans une salle de classe. On dirait d'ailleurs des écoliers écoutant leur maître, sauf qu'ici le professeur, c'est l'écran de télévision branché sur France 98.

À notre entrée dans le café, les [illegible] nous observent [illegible] avant de [illegible] du monde arabe.

Le score est toujours [illegible] équipes et la fumée [illegible] trahit la nervosité ambiante. [illegible] les «écoliers» sont debout [illegible] applaudissent. Le prof est absent ? L'heure de la récré ? Non, le premier but italien. [illegible] cancres au fond de la salle se congratulent comme s'ils avaient eux-mêmes marqué.

Des commentaires vont bon train mais la poursuite du match ramène rapidement le silence dans la classe. Cependant, les élèves restent dissipés et se moquent gentiment des ratages italiens. L'un d'eux, un meneur sans aucun doute, lance *Hamar* à l'adresse de Del Piero, ce qui signifie «âne» en arabe. Une plaisanterie d'accord mais qui mérite carton jaune ou plutôt... bonnet d'âne.

De l'autre côté, les joueurs de *tawlet* jettent de temps en temps un coup d'œil sur le match mais leur partie semble plus intéressante.

À la mi-temps, on se détend un peu. Quelques bancs se libèrent avant d'être occupés de nouveau par d'autres «écoliers». Saïd, tout content (un pléonasme), nous dit que Dieu est de notre côté parce que l'Italie est en train de gagner. Notre chaperon enchaîne en riant : *«Cela serait bien d'avoir Saïd aux côtés des peuples palestinien [illegible] pour réaliser leurs souhaits de toujours»*.



Narguilé renversé

La leçon a repris. Un monsieur, qui se présente lui-même comme Bashar le Palestinien, est le seul à encourager la Norvège. Selon son savant calcul, si les Italiens gagnent, ils vont certainement affronter les Brésiliens en finale et là, la *seleção* de Ronaldo sera sûre de l'emporter. *«Je ne veux absolument pas que le Brésil gagne parce [illegible] conspire contre le Maroc»*, ajoute-t-il. Il ne reste que quelques minutes avant la fin du match et le score est toujours à l'avantage de l'Italie. [illegible] Brusquement, notre ami le [illegible] son narguilé et quitte la [illegible] pour la terrasse, sans vouloir [illegible] quelques cendres sur les [illegible] de son voisin.

[illegible] est maintenant terminé. Les [illegible] sont heureux. Ils s'embrassent et [illegible] comme pour une remise de [illegible] la salle se vide. Les joueurs de [illegible] imperturbables, essayent de terminer [illegible] qui a pris plus de temps que [illegible]

En nous disant au revoir, Saïd nous rappelle encore que Dieu est de notre côté, parce que l'Italie a gagné. [illegible] on se demande pourquoi le [illegible] de Saïd est toujours de notre côté quand cela ne nous concerne pas directement et presque jamais quand il s'agit de nous. ■

Samaa Abu Sharar

Retrouvez chaque semaine la rubrique de Samaa Abu Sharar pendant toute la durée du Mondial.

Lutte contre le chômage

Il est urgent d'avoir les bons chiffres

En matière de chômage, tout est encore à faire. Jusqu'à présent, aucun plan n'a abouti à des résultats tangibles. Mieux que d'accuser l'inertie du gouvernement, on constate une défaillance générale dans l'élaboration de statistiques fiables et indispensables pour combattre le mal.

Pour la première fois, la lutte contre le chômage fera l'objet, le 17 août prochain, d'une conférence, présidée par le ministre du développement administratif. Motivés par la gravité de la situation, les initiateurs font preuve d'une réelle volonté d'aboutir à des solutions concrètes. Avant les divers aspects de la question (causes, objectifs, stratégies...), c'est la nécessité d'une définition précise et correcte du chômage qui figure, en premier lieu, au programme de la réunion. Une évidence pour des pays qui depuis longtemps organisent des plans de lutte contre ce fléau mais pas pour la Jordanie. Reprendre le problème à sa base, tel sera le mérite de cette conférence, si toutefois elle tient ses promesses. Le fait est qu'en matière de chômage comme ailleurs, les blocages surviennent davantage en raison d'un défaut d'organisation générale du pays que d'un manque d'initiatives. Reprendre le problème à sa base, c'est alors préciser le rôle de chaque secteur du gouvernement, c'est déterminer les responsabilités respectives des autorités, des syndicats, du patronat et des organisations sociales comme le prévoient les conférenciers. Mais c'est surtout, nous semble-t-il, en finir avec l'approximation et la négligence dans l'évaluation de la situation.

28% de ch meurs ?

De manière générale, les idées élaborées au sein du gouvernement pour combattre le chômage, sans briller par leur diversité et leur originalité, ne sont pas mauvaises. Reste que, principal obstacle à leur réalisation, les statistiques sont imprécises, arbitraires et non fiables. Au début de cette année, l'Université de Jordanie concluait dans une étude indépendante que le taux de chômage s'élévait à 28%, loin des 15% officiels. Un choc pour l'opinion publique. Un paradoxe troublant aussi, puisque l'Université ne dispose pas de données ou de méthodes d'investigation fondamentalement différentes de celles du gouvernement. En l'absence de chiffres reflétant la réalité du terrain, le gouvernement se trouve donc démuni de



moyens appropriés pour agir auprès de tel ou tel groupe de la population. Tout programme, aussi judicieux puisse-t-il sembler, demeure cantonné dans l'abstraction.

Plusieurs facteurs contribuent à la défaillance des statistiques. Tout d'abord, il n'existe pas de déclaration de travail. Aucun organe centralisé n'est prévu pour réunir les informations sur les travailleurs en Jordanie, salariés ou indépendants. Actuellement, les données reposent sur les listes que donnent les entreprises au Ministère du travail d'une part, à la Sécurité sociale d'autre part. Aussi incomplètes les unes que les autres, elles ne comptabilisent pas notamment les ouvriers des secteurs agricoles et domestiques. Sont également laissés pour compte dans les listes destinées à la Sécurité sociale, les employés des petites entreprises de moins de cinq personnes et les travailleurs de plus de 60 ans.

Il s'agirait donc d'instituer une structure administrative centralisée, qui, appuyée sur une législation appropriée, serait chargée de recueillir les déclarations de travail de toute personne active. Pourquoi ne pas créer aussi un organe de contrôle pour vérifier l'exactitude des informations et surveiller les tentatives d'abus ? Actuellement les contrôles des inspecteurs du travail ne portent que sur les conditions d'emploi et la régularité de la main d'œuvre étrangère, pas sur le recensement de la force de travail proprement dite. De plus ces contrôles sont sporadiques et mal coordonnés.

Sondages revoir

En outre, mises à part les listes mentionnées ci-dessus, les statistiques sont surtout calculées à partir de sondages. Ainsi, comme demandeurs d'emploi sont comptés des gens qui, tout en étant déjà employés sont à la recherche d'un travail offrant de meilleures conditions. C'est le cas de postulants au gouvernement. Sont inclus dans cette même catégorie des personnes qui n'ont jamais travaillé auparavant et ne recherchent pas d'emploi activement. Mais à la question *«aimeriez-vous travailler ?»* ou *«cherchez-vous un travail ?»*, elles répondent *«oui»*, motivées par un simple besoin financier. Inversement des individus qu'on qualifiera à défaut d'«indépendants» (le comptable ambulant, le plombier à ses heures, le transporteur de main d'œuvre pour des chantiers...) ne sont pas toujours pris en considération. C'est l'électricien qui travaille à son compte et se trouve plusieurs fois par semaine en recherche de travail. Doit-il être considéré comme chômeur si le sondage est effectué pendant ces périodes creuses ? En revanche, un indépendant peut se trouver en difficultés suite à une longue pénurie de travail sans que les services du gouvernement soient même au courant de son existence. Et que dire de ceux qui exercent des «petits métiers» ?

Travail clandestin

Bref, le profil du chômeur n'est pas défini. Toute personne en recherche de travail ou désireuse d'exercer une activité susceptible de lui apporter quelque gain est indistinctement retenue comme chômeuse. Or, en principe, est chômeur celui qui a perdu son emploi et par là, sa principale source de revenu ou une personne qui entre sur le marché du travail (dans cette dernière catégorie, il faudrait donc compter les frais diplômés et les Jordaniens qui retournent au pays).

Autre facteur altérant considérablement les statistiques : le travail clandestin. Près de la moitié des immigrants (43%), Égyptiens et Syriens pour la plupart, entrés à la faveur d'un permis touristique, travaillent illégalement. Les contrôles inopinés en ce domaine ne suffisent pas à combattre un phénomène en constante augmentation. Les mesures d'expulsion sont rarement appliquées et le travail des inspecteurs s'avère donc inutile. Là aussi, l'effort devrait d'abord porter sur une meilleure organisation administative et surtout une meilleure collaboration entre les différents organismes gouvernementaux pour l'information, le contrôle et l'application de la loi.

Tant que les pouvoirs publics ne disposent pas de bases statistiques plus adéquates, tout programme sera inopérant. C'est avant tout une administration performante, qu'il convient de mettre en place, apte à comptabiliser la force de travail dans son ensemble et de décrire la situation telle qu'elle est. C'est l'un des premiers pas à franchir si l'on veut éviter qu'une fois de plus les bonnes suggestions de la prochaine conférence se perdent dans l'inefficacité. ■

Véronique Abu-Nijmeh

Pourcentages officiels

Selon la Direction générale des statistiques, le chômage touche 14,4% de la population active (chiffres de 1997). Entre autres données significatives, 77% des chômeurs sont des jeunes de moins de 30 ans. En outre se dessinent deux catégories en fonction des formations suivies : près de la moitié des chômeurs (43,6%) n'ont pas atteint le tawjihi ou pas terminé la scolarité obligatoire, alors qu'un peu plus du tiers (35%) ont fait de hautes, voire de très hautes études. Enfin un peu plus de 41% des chômeurs sont en recherche d'emploi depuis plus d'un an et demi.

En dépit de la pauvreté des initiatives concrètes, le «plan quinquennal du travail (1997-2002)» prévoit de réduire d'ici 2002 le taux de chômage au chiffre très optimiste de 7,9%. Dans la catégorie des personnes ayant suivi une scolarité minimale ou ne l'ayant pas terminée, c'est-à-dire la catégorie fournissant une main d'œuvre bon marché, le nombre de chômeurs devrait baisser progressivement jusqu'au 0% (!). Prévisions plus sombres pour les diplômés universitaires, chez lesquels le chômage devrait passer de 11,2% à 18,1% et surtout ceux qui ont arrêté leurs études après le tawjihi (de 11 à 25,5%). ■

V. A-N.

Portrait

Farid Hinawi, le peintre d'étoiles

Dessinateur d'affiches de cinéma. Un métier artisanal disparu en Occident. Un art copiste qui vend du rêve à l'entrée des salles obscures.

Zarqa, le quartier de Ramzi. 14h, une chaleur étouffante, un trottoir presque vide. *«Là-bas»*, dit un passant en montrant du doigt un vieil atelier sans enseigne. La porte est fermée. Mais un jeune homme qui était en train de faire la queue devant un restaurant de «homos», soudain s'approche. Un calme aux yeux bavards comme ceux de tous les artistes : c'est Hinawi, un nom, une signature qui marque la quasi-totalité des affiches de cinéma de Zarqa.

Il nous laisse entrer dans son univers : deux fauteuils, un bureau puis un rideau qui s'ouvre sur la caverne d'Ali Baba. Des pinceaux, des tissus, des papiers, des crayons jonchent le sol : le vrai désordre d'un peintre. Sur l'un des murs, une jeune fille aux grands yeux noirs rappelle une brune nomade lointaine. En face, une autre créature à la beauté sensuelle.

Farid (c'est son prénom) est le captif de ces visages, de tous les visages qui ornent les affiches de cinéma dont il est l'auteur depuis quatre ans. *«Dans une affiche, c'est le visage qui est important»*, affirme-t-il. C'est le hasard qui a fait de lui un dessinateur d'affiches : *«Je venais de terminer mes études des arts appliqués, quand notre voisin, le propriétaire d'un cinéma, m'a demandé de réaliser une affiche. Je l'ai faite par courtoisie»*. Un travail réussi est la meilleure



Les couleurs mélangées à des produits chimiques sèchent très vite.* «Ceux qui dessinent lentement ne peuvent pas faire ce métier», *prévient Farid (photos T. S.).

des publicités : *«D'autres propriétaires de cinémas ont lu mon nom sur les affiches»*.

Une aubaine qui l'a lancé sur la voie du succès et une affaire rentable : *«Faire un tableau me coûte 50 dinars et je le vends 30 dinars. C'est vraiment de l'art d'accord mais cela ne fait pas vivre. En revanche, je fais un bénéfice de 20 dinars sur chaque affiche»*.

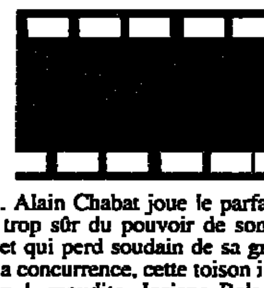
Deux seulement exercent ce métier en Jordanie (Hinawi et Mouhamad Kabaj). Certains disent que ce n'est pas de l'art, que ce ne sont que de vulgaires copies. Hinawi, né dans une famille d'artistes, répond qu'il fera toujours ce métier. Un travail à mi-temps puisque Farid est aussi professeur d'art. Son boulot de dessinateur commence quand le propriétaire du cinéma lui apporte les posters et les dépliants publicitaires des films qui vont être distribués. Quelques lignes en anglais ou en indien sont censées donner une idée de l'intrigue et de son déroulement. *«Les proprios des cinémas de Zarqa se débrouillent bien en indien»*, précise l'artiste en riant aux éclats. Les films indiens sont en fait très prisés des jeunes, friands de mélodrames. Parfois, le dépliant n'est pas suffisant. *«La photo de l'acteur principal est brouillée alors je suis obligé de regarder le film pour déterminer les traits de son visage»*, révèle Farid. Mettre en valeur la vedette du film est la seule contrainte imposée au dessinateur. Sinon il a la liberté de choisir la photo qui exprime le mieux le contenu du film, selon le principe de l'exagération : *«Vous connaissez cette pub ? Le type traîne sa voiture en panne avec son jean Levi's. Moi, je fais la même chose : un petit feu devient un brasier, un revolver se change en pistolet mitrailleur, une scène intime sans aucun intérêt dans le film devient le pivot de l'affiche»*. Cet espace de liberté se réduit quand il s'agit de théâtre : *«Dans l'affiche d'une pièce, tous les comédiens doivent figurer»*. C'est plus difficile surtout quand il faut tout refaire parce que l'actrice principale se trouve un peu moche.

Chaque œuvre lui prend au moins six heures de travail. Sur une toile de coton rectangulaire (3 mètres sur 5), il jette au crayon une ébauche. Il essaye alors de déterminer la place des noms des acteurs, du titre du film etc.. Ensuite, il s'attaque aux traits des visages qui doivent respecter au plus près la réalité. *«Les yeux disent beaucoup*, insiste en particulier Farid, *les dents serrées expriment la colère mais les yeux sont plus éloquents»*. Quant aux cheveux, le dessinateur ne peut modifier ni la couleur, ni la coupe. *«Si on change tout ça, le public aura du mal à reconnaître sa star préférée»*.

Les couleurs, qualifiées «d'encre des calligraphes», sont transparentes et délayées dans l'eau. Elles sont aussi mélangées avec de la gomme blanche et des oxydes de cuivre pour résister aux intempéries. Ainsi transformées, ces couleurs sèchent très vite et une belle gradation de couleurs demande une grande rapidité d'exécution. *«Ceux qui dessinent lentement ne peuvent pas faire ce métier»*, prévient l'artiste qui manie aussi vite la parole que son pinceau. Les tons utilisés pour le fond de l'affiche sont essentiels car ils déterminent les reflets sur les visages et organisent l'harmonie. *«Pour Titanic, j'ai choisi l'orange clair avec un dégradé de jaune»*, précise Farid Hinawi, tandis que le fond d'une affiche pour un long métrage anglais est toujours unicolore. *«Cela correspond à la nature froide et classique des Anglais»*, assure encore ce mauvais spectateur qui n'est jamais allé au cinéma pour son plaisir. ■

Tahrir Salah

Ciel ! Ma femme me trompe avec une femme !



***Gazon maudit*, comédie française de Josiane Balasko (1994) avec Alain Chabat, Victoria Abril et Josiane Balasko.**
En prêt au Centre culturel français.

Vous allez dire *«encore une histoire d'amour !»*. Oui, mais celle-ci est différente. Pas de promesses nunuches d'ados acnéïques, pas de baisers tragiques sur le pont d'un paquebot de luxe sur le point de couler, pas de Di Caprio et autres Roméo à deux sous. Dans Gazon Maudit, on s'aime, on se déteste, on se déchire mais dans la bonne humeur. *«Une comédie romantique, quoi»*. En quelque sorte, mais vous n'y êtes pas encore... Laurent (Alain Chabat) est marié à Loli (Victoria Abril), bonne épouse un peu niaise que son mari trompe le plus souvent possible. Un jour, débarque Marianne (Josiane Balasko, qui est aussi la réalisatrice du film), lookée à la garçonne, fumeuse de cigarillos, gouailleuse et amatrice de... jolies femmes. À partir de là, se noue autour d'un couple à trois une intrigue atypique : qui de Marianne ou de Laurent gagnera le cœur de Loli ? Une lutte de séduction qui bouleverse les normes sociales et le fameux ego masulin. Imaginez un peu la tête de votre mari qui découvre que vous avez une liaison avec une femme. De quoi déstabiliser plus d'un mâle bourré au viagra. L'homosexualité féminine est un sujet tabou même en Occident, que Josianne Balasko a su traiter en déchaussant les gros sabots. Même les scènes d'amour ne sont pas filmées de manière grotesque ou choquante. Le propos dérange certes mais les acteurs parviennent à nous rendre proche et crédible une histoire qui a priori est bien loin de nos modèles traditionnels. Alain Chabat joue le parfait mari volage, trop sûr du pouvoir de son entrejambes et qui perd soudain de sa grandeur devant la concurrence, cette toison intime - ce gazon !- maudite. Josiane Balasko interprète sans vulgarité une amante forte et sensible à la fois. Victoria Abril est peut-être la plus drôle et la plus décalée aussi, tant elle accepte avec simplicité sa nouvelle situation sentimentale : trois jours avec l'une, trois jours avec l'autre et au diable la jalousie. Les acteurs ont pris du plaisir à jouer ensemble et engagent le spectateur à se laisser mener par le bout du nez dans une histoire de notre temps, à l'heure des défilés «gay» (le 21 juin dernier en France) et des contrats d'union entre personnes du même sexe. Au bout d'une heure et demi, tous nos repères classiques ont été mis joyeusement sens dessus dessous et peut-être en ressort-on avec plus d'incertitudes sur le bonheur en amour qu'avant. ■

Le Jourdain



The Star Stadium

Edited by Abdul Hamid Adasi



Mondial Scoreboard

Chilean spectators crying defeat by Brazil

Mondial Scoreboard

2nd round
Italy vs Norway 1-0
Brazil vs Chile 4-1
France vs Paraguay 1-0 (golden goal)
Denmark vs Nigeria 4-1
Germany vs Mexico
Holland vs Yugoslavia
Croatia vs Romania
England vs Argentina
Quarter finals
Brazil vs Denmark
France vs Italy

Top scorers



PARIS—Top goals scored during this weeks matches are:
Italy's Christian Vieri (5).
Argentina's Gabriel Batistuta and Chile's Marcelo Salas(4 each).
France's Thierry Henry, and Mexico's Luis Hernandez. Brazil's Cesar Sampaio (3 goals each).
This following have 2 goals each and they include: Davor Suker (Croatia), Marc Wilmots (Belgium), Ariel Ortega (Argentina), Roberto Baggio (Italy), Bebeto (Brazil), Salaheddine Bassir (Morocco), Abdeljlil Hadda (Morocco), Shaun Bartlett (South Africa), Francisco Morientes (Spain), Kiko (Spain), Fernando Hierro (Spain), Philip Cocu (Netherlands), Ronald de Boer (Netherlands), Ricardo Pelaez (Mexico), Oliver Bierhoff (Germany), Juergen Klinsmann (Germany), Theodore Whitmore (Jamaica), Viorel Moldovan (Romania). Miguel Benitez (Paraguay), Jose Cardozo.

Star of the week

Blanc strikes gold to keep France alive



LENS—Laurent Blanc kept France's flame alive on Sunday with the first golden goal at a World Cup finals as the hosts ousted Paraguay 1-0. A taut second-round encounter looked headed toward a penalty shootout. But with six minutes of the second period of extra time remaining, Blanc struck gold. Unmarked just seven meters out, the big defender moved purposefully on to David Trezeguet's downward header to show a killer instinct lacking in some of his teammates. He lashed the ball past inspirational Paraguayan captain Jose Luis Chilavert to spark nationwide celebrations. It was tough on Paraguay, which had defended stoutly throughout a game memorable largely for its dramatic finale.

The golden goal has been adopted by FIFA to reduce the number of penalty shootouts. The first scorer of a World Cup golden goal was Masayuki Okada, who struck two minutes from the end of extra time to give Japan a 3-2 win in an Asian playoff with Iran last November. It was also used at the European championships in 1996, when Germany beat the Czech Republic 2-1.

France's prize for Sunday's victory is a quarterfinal match against Italy in Paris tomorrow. ■

Game of the Week : Denmark vs Nigeria

Denmark dumps Africa's final hope, Nigeria



SAINT-DENIS, France—Bye-bye Nigeria. Goodbye Africa. The last of the five African nations, Olympic champions Nigeria, were routed by Denmark 4-1 Sunday, sending the Danes into the quarterfinals at the World Cup.

Peter Meuller scored on nearly his first touch of the tournament, and Denmark had a pair of goals in the first 12 minutes. "It is not about preparation and tactics," Denmark coach Bo Johansson said when asked about inserting Meuller in the lineup. "It is about players who suddenly find their way of playing." The Danes found it after a mediocre opening-round performance that saw them advance mainly because they were in a group with weaklings South Africa and Saudi Arabia. "We're on a high, definitely a high," said goalkeeper Peter Schmeichel, who kept Nigeria's ballyhooed attack at bay.

The victory over the Africans put the 1992 European champions into the round of eight for the first time, and in only their second appearance at a World Cup. The only other time Denmark reached the tournament, it advanced to the second round in 1986.

They now face defending champions Brazil tomorrow at Nantes.

"We have to try," Johansson said. "Nigeria cannot try any longer. We will play against the best team in the world. We know we're not the best team in the world."

The early goals continued a pattern of first-half woes for Nigeria. The Africans trailed Spain before rallying twice and allowed the fastest goal of the tournament, 51 seconds, in a 3-1 loss to Paraguay.

After a second-round appearance in its debut in 1994 and arriving in France with several highly touted European-based players, Nigeria was picked as an outsider that could possibly break through Europe and South America's stranglehold on the tournament. But defensive mistakes squashed its chances early.

Meuller, making his first appearance in France 98, buried his opportunity from the top of the penalty area in the third minute. Meuller had a hand in Denmark's second goal, blasting a free kick from 25 yards that forced goalie Peter Rufai into a two-handed block. But the Nigerians didn't react fast enough to clear the rebound and Brian Laudrup put it away. "Obviously we needed to concentrate more at the beginning," Rufai said. "We lost it all in the first 15 minutes."

The Nigerians took nearly 30 minutes to recover from the pair of goals, finally getting some sustained possession and pressure on Danish keeper Peter Schmeichel, but creating nothing dangerous. The second half was more of the same, with substitute Ebbe Sand scoring on his second touch of the ball in the 60th minute, just 30 seconds after he replaced Meuller. Rufai's inability to hold another shot cost Nigeria a fourth goal in the 76th minute. Martin Jorgensen sent a low shot in from the right that Rufai bobbled. Sand chased it down and with Rufai chasing him, sent it back to Jorgensen, who crossed to Thomas Helveg for an easy goal.

Nigeria finally saved some pride in the 77th when second-half substitute Tijani Babangida volleyed in a cross from Mutiu Adepoju. "That's soccer, isn't it?" Nigeria winger Finidi George said. "Denmark has a very good attack. It created several chances and converted. We only had a few chances." ■

Scoring same as '94 but tactics make Cup much more wide-open

PARIS—Cool weather and hot tactics have helped create a wide-open World Cup. Statistics from the tournament's 48-game first round show teams are attacking and running the field, despite improved goalkeeping. "We saw that there is more room for all these teams to go forward," Gerard Houllier, the head of FIFA's technical study committee, said Sunday.

An 11-point analysis of detailed studies of the first round found the players in better shape and better skilled, and the coaches more open to attack than four years ago, when the tournament was held in the United States. "The technical level is extremely high. All players have a level of technical expertise much higher than in 1994," Houllier said.

Even the weather is cooperating. While scoring is virtually unchanged from four years ago, Houllier said the players are more active in milder conditions. "The climate is cooler," he said. "It was hot in the United States in '94. Teams were more focused on controlling the ball. We are seeing more counterattacks and faster scoring. The one-on-one and other shows of athletic ability certainly are much higher than in 1994. "The players are playing harder and running faster." Houllier, a former coach of the French national team, said. More teams use formations that encourage offense, with the 3-5-2 featuring an athletic, playcalling sweeper the favorite. Four years ago, most used a lineup with four deep defenders.

A pressing defense is all but gone, replaced by block formations that force attackers to dribble more, creating tighter patterns and the chances of fast breaks. "In the United States, there were a lot of goals from short passes," Houllier said. "Here, a lot of goals (14) have been scored on breakaways." Strikers remain the top scorers. But Houllier and Jurg Nepfer, FIFA's technical coordinator, said midfielders have found the mark.

In the first round, midfielders scored 47 times, or 37.3 percent of all goals, compared with 25.8 percent in 1994. Strikers, who supplied 65.6 percent of the goals four years ago, were down to 52.4 percent (66 goals) this year, Nepfer said.

The average game has seen 2.63 goals, compared with 2.47 in '94 and 2.28 goals-per-game average of the defense-dominated 1990 tournament in Italy. While the average score hasn't changed much from '94, the average scoring play has. The number of long-range goals from outside the penalty area was 13, or 10.3 percent, compared with 20.5 percent last time. Scores inside the goal area, conversely, have increased, numbering 33, or a jump from 16.1 percent to 26.2 percent. Corner kicks, meanwhile, have produced 17 goals, compared with just 4 at the same stage four years ago. "The teams are very good at playing the ball in the air," Houllier said.

The most dramatic change, however, has been in goal. "The goalkeepers are playing better than in 1994," he said. "We've seen some great saves and plays by the goalkeepers. Teams from Asia and Africa have made great advances in training their goalkeepers." ■

Nigeria coach Milutinovic not saying goodbye in any language

PARIS—Few expect Nigeria's coach Bora Milutinovic to be in his 'ejector seat of a job' for much longer after his side crashed 4-1 to Denmark in the World Cup second round. But the Serb, who had enjoyed only seven months with Nigeria, was not about to walk the plank.

Would Milutinovic, who has coached no fewer than four nations at World Cup finals, be staying in his job, the reporters asked him. "My future is my life, my family," he said. "I am a very happy man." Nigeria has had four coaches in four years but all have fallen out with the federation. Milutinovic's predecessor Philippe Troussier said that "only a cowboy can manage the Nigerian team." Would Milutinovic be saying goodbye to Nigeria? "My English is not very good," he said. "But I never say goodbye." What were his plans for the future?

"I'm a soccer coach, I really don't know what I'm going to do in the future," he said. Would he be going back to Lagos with the team, who are likely to get a hostile reception and all of whom, it should be said, live and play outside their home country. "I'm staying to watch the World Cup.

My commitment to the federation ends in July, when the World Cup finishes. I cannot tell you what I'm going to do earlier, I don't know. The decision is not mine."

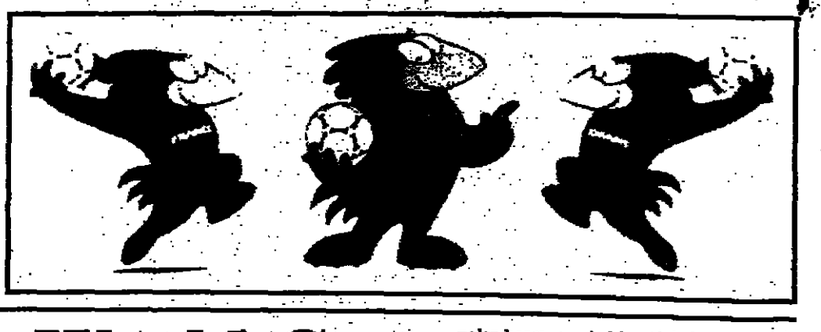
Did he expect to be back for his fifth World Cup in succession, in 2002?

"You know," he said, "I don't even know what I'm going to be doing tomorrow morning."■

Fan of the week



Ronaldo's fiance watching the Brazilian success





Hooliganism at the World Cup

By Michael Thompson-Noel

NO ONE should be surprised that England's soccer thugs have besmirched the World Cup in France, for they are the embodiment, the flying cohorts of a peculiar phenomenon, English naffness, which cloaks the land of Shakespeare like a dirty brown fog.

Where it came from, no one is sure, but the word 'naff' is one of the 20th century's finest additions to the English language. Technically, it is still a slang word. But naff's usefulness as an adjective is so great that it will soon be regarded as a proper word. Put it like this: if you don't use the word naff, you don't really speak English.

The 8th edition of A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English says naff means vulgar, common, despicable, hence, generally, contemptible.

The factors that have created the yobbish culture of Naff Britannia may prove impossible to stifle or remedy. Does Britain's imperialist history have anything to do with it? Its island sensibility? Its long record of misgovernment? (Winston Churchill said the British were practically ungovernable, except in times of war).

Is Britain's class system, with its supreme mutability, part of the equation? The rich/poor gap? The banality of most British urban architecture and town planning? Post-industrial alienation? The media? It says most of what there is to say about Britain and the British (more specifically, England and the English) at the end of the 20th century, and would have been of use to all those hand-wringers who have struggled to express the depth of their revulsion at the way drunken, window-smashing, bottle-hurling, head-cracking, worthless, crass, yobbish English hooligans have marred the soccer World Cup in France, which started on June 10.

But not the English. English hooligans have run riot. Some have been imprisoned, deported, or have beaten up locals. It is claimed that the hooligans are only a small minority, perhaps 1 per cent of the thousands of English who have travelled to France to support their team. But the numbers are not important; there has been fury at the way English yobbos have sullied the most important festival of the planet's most popular sport.

The English have not been the only troublemakers. Vicious German thugs caused extreme anguish in Lens last weekend. But it is the English who have caused the greatest mayhem, and provoked, in their homeland, the traditional response: expressions of shame, or even of surprise that the deep-rooted problem of English soccer hooliganism is still as dangerous as ever.

Surreptitiously, the English media have loved it. "English Soccer Thugs Trash Marseilles" is a relishable storyline, especially in an era of gleeful media dumbing-down, though care has been taken to avoid the trap of overt xenophobia.

However, England invented soccer, and the sport remains a fundamental feature of English culture. As a result, English newspapers and TV stations marked the build-up to the World Cup with ceaseless and aggressive hype, salted with broadsides (not unjustified) at the French organisers.

Once English thugs in Marseilles started fighting with local citizens, the English media became teary and remorseful. Paul Hayward, chief sports writer for *The Daily Telegraph*, said that if the violence continued, England's team should withdraw.

The naive notion of an English withdrawal was popular throughout the English media, especially among narcoleptic leader-writers of the posh and prissy press unaware that advice to the England team to come home was no more useful than instructing polar bears worried by global warming to move to Libreville. Alan Clark, the sparklingly un-naff, rightwing Conservative MP for Kensington and Chelsea, did far better, asserting that the World Cup finals were akin to a medieval tournament (the implication being that chimpanzee-like obstreperousness was inevitable at such an important primate sporting get-together), and maintaining, more controversially, that because they were often provoked, England's supporters, famous for their martial spirit, "really haven't got a chance...everybody from the Archbishop of Canterbury kind of relates them to the Serbian military police."

Anger. Frustration. Hatred: Racism. Jingoism. Xenophobia. Rampaging violence. Where do they come from? They come from the heartlands of Naff Britannia.

Bill Buford, an American literary agent who has studied English soccer violence and written a book about it, *Among the Thugs*, believes there is a coherent tradition of machismo in Britain which is more extreme than that in Latin and Mediterranean countries. In Buford's view, the English lad is proud, loutish, territorial, easy to provoke and excessively nationalistic. Desperately wanting an England to defend and love, he does not want Europe, and finds the concept of the European Union incomprehensible.■

Financial Times Syndication

In 'Out of sight,' Clooney gives a bad guy a good name

By Stephen Hunter

WHAT PLACE is this? Where are we now? Well, the beautiful woman pulls a Remington 12-gauge pump out of her car trunk, jacks a shell into the chamber and collars a filthy escapee from a Florida prison camp. Unfazed by the .70-caliber bore looming before him, he strips her of the gun, dumps her in the same trunk, climbs in with her, and a cohort drives them away.

He's a career criminal; she's a US marshal. Naturally, he begins to flirt.

Naturally, she flirts back, even as she reaches for her new SIG-Sauer .380, a gift from Dad. Where are we now? We could only be one place: in the loopy, vivid, funny, crazed dangerous world of Elmore Leonard, our preeminent crime novelist, whose "Out of Sight" has just made it to the screen, with George Clooney as the good-bad guy and Jennifer Lopez bad bad-good girl.

Note the punctuation in the qualifiers, please. That small jot between the words explains what's so fascinating about Leonard. The key to nearly everyone's character and motive is the hyphen that balances an equipoise ofcontradictions, the opposing values. Almost no one is pure, as in pure evil or pure good. It's a universe of the ambivalent, the constantly shifting, the occasionally impulsive; it's the universe of uncertainty, where each character has a touch of darkness and light to him or her, a constant war between nurture and aggression, and behind their cunning eyes, we can watch these dynamic forces battle it out bitterly.

This is true of all of Leonard, but it's particularly true of this Leonard, as directed by the on-again/off-again Steven Soderbergh, here on again. Pro bank robber Jack Foley (Clooney) pulls an all-time dumb job and for his trouble is sent to Glades Correctional Facility deep in the jungle primeval of the Sunshine State. This is an unpleasant situation for him, since, as a three-time loser, he'll be in until either Paramount or Disney's asteroid crunches us to dust. But Jack is the man with the plan. Clever (but not smart), he essentially hijacks another escape attempt as cover for his own, and makes it out at the other guys' expense. That's a debt that will have to be paid. But it turns out he's not just out, he's on a mission, though not from God but from mammon.

His victimized marshal, Karen Sisco (Lopez), her pride hurt and her hormones addled, wants a job on the FBI's fugitive task force, charged with rounding up the runaways, though her motives battle over her. Clearly she's a woman drawn to dangerous men, and her current squeeze is a married, strung-out FBI agent (Michael Keaton, reprising the role he played in Quentin Tarantino's "Jackie Brown," the last film based on a Leonard book). She wants Jack back, but she also wants Jack, period, and eventually follows him to snowy Detroit, where his caper is coming down. So this is a cat-and-mouse game, except it's not, it's really a cat-and-cat game, since neither of the protagonists is without considerable resources (one scene, where Karen deals with a would-be rapist, using a folding steel baton, is truly terrifying).

It sounds simple; it's not. The movie, from the hard diamond of a start in that trunk, floats forward and backward in time, eventually sketching an entire community of those involved with the law, fighting either for it or against it. Like Montagues and Capulets they all know one other, they have a common culture and natural aggression, and they're all professional. Clooney is the most impressive he's been on film. Jack Foley feels real, not like some Hollywood improvisation. Foley is charming, handsome, graceful, cultured, energetic and disciplined. He just can't stop committing crimes. He's the eternal enigma of the human soul, a man somehow miswired so thoroughly that he can't begin to imagine a life on the other side of the fence, a man who can express himself meaningfully only by taking what is not his. He cannot be cured; he can only be incarcerated or executed.

On the other hand, Lopez makes you feel the complexities of Karen, and her little twitch to run with the wolves. She has the beautiful woman's trick of hearing only what she wants to hear, and as much as she loves being beautiful, she also loves stepping from behind that beauty and dealing with reality with the professional police agent's untrammeled use of force. This can be physical or psychological, and watching her chew up a pickup-minded Detroit ad guy in a bar is another dark pleasure in the film. In some ways Soderbergh does a much better job than Tarantino. He handles the time shifts more adroitly, always keeping us on track; he goes easy on the violence, and when he does unleash it, it's short, fast and ugly. He understands the dangers of guns. And he captures Leonard's trademark fascination with truly bad guys.

This would be Snoopy Miller, a dead-eyed Detroit operator who uses violence more readily than necessary, but who hides it behind extravagant social graces. Don Cheadle brings real chill to this bad boy's badness. His advantage is that unlike all the others in the cast, he has no hyphens in his character; there's no opposition in him at all, only hard, cold hunger. He's as scary as they come, and his nastiness gives "Out of Sight" its special sting. The movie is good-good. ■

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

Cherot bets the house and Wins

By Amy Wallace

HOLLYWOOD—When he wrote, directed, edited and starred in his first film, Christopher Scott Cherot—a self-described "natural cynic"—knew enough to limit his expectations.

The 30-year-old former cab driver, who admits to relying on a book called "How to Edit" while in the cutting room, planned to use "Hav Plenty" as a video resume. Someday, he hoped, the romantic comedy—about a would-be writer and the stunning, materialistic woman for whom he pines—would help him get real work.

Then, the $65,000 film was bought for about $1 million by Miramax, which released it this month. Overnight, Cherot joined the small fraternity of young filmmakers who are lucky enough to have succeeded and smart enough to worry about the impact of success on their work.

What's unique about Cherot is that his worries about the downside of signing with a large distributor do not merely jangle around in his head. They are up on the screen—after Miramax asked Cherot to add a new ending to "Hav Plenty," he decided to make his angst part of the film.

"Miramax wanted a happier ending," explained Cherot, whose original film left the lovers in an ambiguous relationship, neither together nor apart. "I said, 'I can write anything I want?' They said, 'Sure.' I'm sure they were thinking more in terms of, like, a wedding. Or someone riding up on a horse with a rose in his teeth."

Instead, Cherot penned a tongue-in-cheek epilogue that had audiences at this year's Sundance Film Festival—where "Hav Plenty" was in competition—giggling. Without giving too much away, the new ending takes place at a film festival, where "Hav Plenty's" main character is screening his first film, "Tru Love."

Film distributors hover around him, sounding like hucksters. "We definitely need to do some business together," says one, who says "Tru Love" needs "a more optimistic ending. But other than that, you stand to make millions."

Cherot admits that when he proposed this scene to Miramax executives—the very people his new ending mock—he never thought they'd go for it. "But they looked at it and said, 'We love it. What kind of a budget do you want?' It was amazing." (Ultimately, the new ending and improvements to the soundtrack brought the total budget to about $250,000.)

Thus, Cherot began his film career by publicly biting the hand that funds him. And while doing so, he won the support of not only Miramax co-chairman Harvey Weinstein, who calls Cherot a "creative force," but also Kenneth "Babyface" Edmonds, whose company signed on to produce "Hav Plenty" after seeing it at the Acapulco Black Film Festival last summer.



Christopher Scott Cherot says his film "Hav Plenty," which follows a romance over three days, is autobiographical.

Earlier this year, Miramax signed Cherot to a multi-picture deal under which he will write, direct and possibly act in an unspecified number of films (the first of which will be made in association with Edmonds Entertainment, which produced last year's sleeper hit "Soul Food"). When the deal was announced, Cherot's agent, Cassian Elwes of the William Morris Agency, summed it up this way: "A guy who made a movie for no money is now an extremely rich young man."

Not bad for a Bronx native who never finished college and who wrote "Hav Plenty" to try to get over a broken heart. Cherot studied filmmaking for three years at Manhattan's Tisch School of the Arts, but left one year shy of graduation in order to start preproduction on "Hav Plenty."

During that period, he says, he drove a cab "to finance myself _ to eat." To finance the film, he borrowed money from friends and family, the bulk of it from his mother, a physical therapist who took out a fifth mortgage on her Queens home.

"That added a little bit of pressure," Cherot remembers. "On top of being director, producer, actor, editor, writer, script supervisor, makeup and wardrobe and art director, there was this: Make the film or lose the house."

He admits the script is autobiographical, closely following three days in a real-life romance. But he never intended to play the lead role himself, only stepping in when the actor he'd cast dropped out two weeks before the start of production.

As it turned out, the tensions of simultaneously making and starring in his first film helped the handsome Cherot to better resemble the character, whom he envisioned as "a non-leading-man leading man"—a guy who isn't smooth, suave or stereotypically good-looking."

"I didn't work hard at all to make him not look glamorous," he says of his character. During the three weeks of shooting, "I was exhausted. Those red-rimmed eyes and that broken-out complexion were all part of the reality of what I was going through."

In addition to portraying an atypical hero, Cherot also wanted his film to break some other conventions common to big-screen love stories. Not once in "Hav Plenty" does a character wax poetic about what it means to be in love. And never, ever are the two lovers shown kissing in the rain. "Forget that," said the director. "I don't care how in love you are, put up a damn umbrella."

Cherot, who counts directors Robert Zemeckis and Billy Wilder among his role models, says he was conscious not to simply serve up what moviegoers may expect from a film starring mostly young blacks.

"I wanted to show a black male character who wasn't a player, who wasn't trying to hit on all the women around him," he said. "I was also very careful not to specify what class he was from. And there's no 'hood talk (from him). Most of the dirty language comes from Hav and her friends—the upper-class people."

Though Cherot knows he is "always going to fall into that 'black filmmaker' category," he says he wants to tell stories that everyone can relate to. "That's what my dedication goes to: presenting stories and characters that we don't see in everyday life. And that's not necessarilyalways going to be black people."

His next project: "A road-buddy-love-story. Sort of 'Gunfight at the OK Corral' meets 'Love Story.'" But he won't be the star. "I will never play the lead in any of my films again. I think I can do a better job as a director," he said, remembering how grueling it was to jump into a scene only "after running around checking the shot, after blocking with a stand-in, after rehearsing with the actors, after making sure we're on some semblance of a schedule and after making sure the caterer knows where his holding area is."

But he won't banish himself from the screen forever. "I might act maybe in a small part in a film of mine, just for pure vanity—like because I want to see me on the screen with Halle Berry," he said.■

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

Tomatoes in Naples

By Giles MacDonogh

So you'd like a pizza? Naples would be unthinkable without tomatoes. Yet they are of no great antiquity. As we know, both the tomato and the potato came from the New World and settled at Europe's northern and southern poles

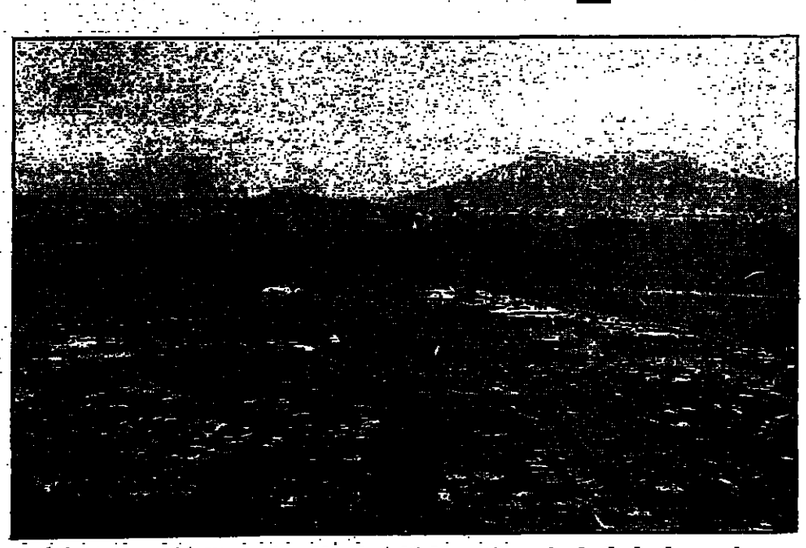
In both cases this colonization was long drawn-out. The potato took centuries to win over the people of Germany and, even 100 years ago, the small, yellow pomodoro or 'golden apple' was still disdained in Neapolitan kitchens

What Neapolitan cooking looked like in those days emerges from prints and the pages of travellers. The common people used their hands to eat pasta dressed in oil and garlic, or simply cooked in the pan in street kitchens, strewn with local, pecorino cheese and taken home on sheets of paper

In the late 18th century, Goethe took time off to examine the city's markets which were another enchanting side of the port and its people: a "paradise where everyone lives in a sort of drunken absent-mindedness". He was impressed by the street life and the frittaruoli, deep-frying rings of dough in the streets. He stopped to gaze at the stalls with their heaps of fresh vegetables which sprang up around the calendar in the fertile volcanic soils beneath Mount Vesuvius. In the fish market in Santa Lucia he marveled at the baskets which were filled with crab, oysters, sea squirts and little mussels

Then, as now, lemonade-sellers could be found about the city, squeezing the big, sweet, Sorrento lemons and mixing them with ice and water. The via Toledo was the most appetizing street: heaps of raisins, figs and melons; hanging sausages, chickens, capons, baby lambs and veal. The 18th century Neapolitan was a ravenous meat-eater. Modern restaurants would have you believe he consumes nothing but fish these days

Goethe knew good mozzarella too, or at least the animals which were responsible for its production. He encountered a herd of them crossing a brook, and looked "into the wild, blood-red eyes of the hippopotamus-like buffaloes"



A panorama of the culinary city of Naples with Mount Vesuvius in the background

Some of the more ancient Neapolitan staples were available as antipasti at the Quattro Passi restaurant at Massa Lubrense, just round the bay behind Vesuvius. The pizza rustica was positively medieval—ricotta with ham wrapped in the sweetest pastry. It was a dish which might have seduced Parsifal when he visited the magician Klingsor in his garden: in theory the ravishing Villa Rufolo in nearby Ravello. It was followed by some of Goethe's deep-fried food—little balls of potato, mozzarella, rice and dough

The meal itself, however, was wrought in a more modern Neapolitan idiom: fish and tomatoes dominated. The high points were some prawns cooked on a lemon leaf; a prawn and garlic soup under a pastry lid: papardelle with courgettes and parmigiano reggiano; and pezzogna, a small, local sea bass, cooked in acqua pazza or 'mad water'—very dilute tomato juice. The fish tasted like the most tender chicken

Pezzogna was sadly unavailable at La Cantinella, which many regard as urban Naples' best restaurant. We had to be content with a common or garden sea bass. The treat here was the linguine Santa Lucia which preceded the fish—home-made egg noodles with the freshest sea food, a dish which but for the tomatoes sums up all that is good in Naples today

In Cirio's research station in the northern suburbs, they are labouring to create the perfect San Marzano, or local plum tomato, which has been sadly prone to blights and mishaps. It was Cirio and others of its ilk who popularized the tomato in the second half of the last century. They encouraged farmers to plant it and the rural Italian soon developed a taste for it, until its flavour became linked with Italy the world over

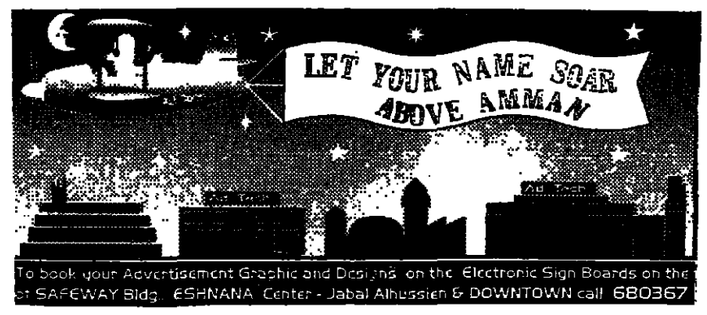
It ennobled the humble, local pizza. The result is still to be found in a handful of traditional pizzarie in Naples. At the simple, white-tiled Da Michele you have a choice of just two: Margareta and Napolitana. The same suppliers have provided flour, olive oil, garlic, mozzarella, pecorino and oregano for 100 years and throughout that period plum tomatoes have come not on wheelbarrows from the slopes of Vesuvius, but in tins from Cirio

Information: Locanda Quattro Passi, Massa Lubrense +39 81 808 1271. The restaurant will be the seat of Italian cookery weeks from September 12 to October 10: La Cantinella, via Cuma, Naples, +39 81 7648684: Da Michele, via Cesare Sersale, +39 81 5539204■

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Is it just a 'tune-up' of Windows 95?:

Microsoft Windows 98 is here

WINDOWS 98 went on sale in the United States on Thursday 25 June, and was available in a number of countries across the world simultaneously.

The launch, as usual, was surrounded by a media festival which resulted in massive numbers of customers lining up to get their copies from computers stores all over the United States.

Windows 98 was surrounded by a large debate regarding Microsoft's anti-trust practices, which have been the major topic of discussion in the international IT market over the past months.

In a way, the US State Department ensured that everyone around the world had heard about Windows 98 many months before its launch.

Of course, the result of that whole legal battle was to allow Microsoft to launch Windows 98, with Internet Explorer integrated into it; awaiting the court ruling when the trial goes to court in September this year.

Still, when compared to the hype that surrounded the launch of Windows 95, it doesn't seem that Windows 98 received the same level of enthusiasm.

Then again, Windows 95 represented a complete overhaul of the Windows operating system, introducing a whole new user interface.

Whereas Windows 98 only represents a 'tune-up' of Windows 95, which eliminates all reported bugs and offers a variety of upgrades and additions to the operating system.

In spite of that, every time Microsoft introduces a new operating system, it sends ripples across the whole industry.

Windows 98 is priced at $90, and should run on any computer that can operate Windows 95. Upgrading to Windows 98 will involve the use of more hard disk space.

As far as upgrading is concerned, Microsoft is recommending that business users make the move up to Windows NT, rather than Windows 98, as it provides a more suitable platform for demanding business environments.

It is expected that most users, for a while, will stick to Windows 95; however, Windows 98 will succeed in gradually taking over the desktops of most computer users across the world, as usually is the case with operating systems.

Microsoft estimates that some 120 million PCs currently run Windows 95.

With a potential market like that, Microsoft is hardly worried about the future of Windows 98!

Getting back to the Internet browser, which caused all the controversy, Microsoft allowed computer manufacturers to pre-load other, competing browsers with PCs sold with Windows 98. However, it is expected that Microsoft's market share in the browser market will continue to grow at the expense of main rival, Netscape.

More integration between the operating system and the Internet browser offers more flexibility and ease of use, establishing the Internet as a dominant part of the desktop.

Main developments in Windows 98 also include the operating systems ability to better support new hardware peripheries like digital cameras, color scanners and there is better support for television displays, as part of a move towards more 'Net PCs' which should hook up to home TV sets.

Microsoft claim that Windows 98 is 'faster and more reliable than Windows 95'. These points are to be determined by users, and shouldn't take too long before millions, around the world will have test-driven their copy of Windows 98. ■

Secure Electronic Transactions (SET)

PAYMENT STANDARDS on the Internet are developing, to cater to the large trading volumes expected in the electronic market place.

So far, leading credit card companies are supporting the Secure Electronic Transactions (SET) Protocol 1.0.

This system is based on a number of encryption and digital identification technologies, and offers truly secure transactions and paves the way for the quicker proliferation of electronic cash (E-cash), electronic cheques and what is known as 'virtual wallets'.

With major computer companies, like IBM and Hewlett-Packard (HP) putting their weight behind SET, you can expect to see more SET-compliant merchant solutions.

Different software implementations will be put to work, for different types of businesses, such as retailers, wholesalers, banks, airlines etc.

The problem, though, continues to be that credit cards are mainly the most secure form so far, which does not provide a solution to consumers who wish to pay their average bills over the Internet. If households will pay bills through the Internet, there needs to be some sort of bank-transfer system by which one's account is automatically discounted. This is very similar to the concept of 'writing an electronic cheque'.

If there is an industry support for one, unified standard, it would be fair to forecast that electronic commerce will rise to the massive sum of $ trillion by the year 2010, from a sum of $ 3 billion in 1997. ■

Network printing server from D-Link

NETWORK USERS today need 'monitoring' software for network printers, to ensure the smooth operation of network environments.

D-Link produces a print server, called the 'DP-300' which offers fast, Ethernet multiprotocol print server solutions.

The new generation of D-Link DP-300 print servers are good for 10/100 Mbps transmission rates, with highlights of user-friendliness and easy-installation for Microsoft Windows.

All print servers from D-Link support a wide range of network protocols, ideal for mixed LAN environments. All products can actively monitor and collect information on network-printing, and updating the administrator as to the status while they are printing.

The DP-300 comes with a piece of software, PS Admin, which is a Windows-based network printing administrative program. ■

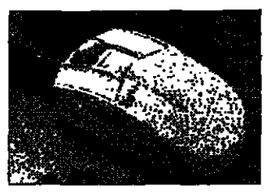
News update

Windows NT 5.0 to the challenge

● With Windows NT 5.0, Microsoft hopes to challenge the supremacy of Novell Netware, as the leading network operating system. The competition with Netware 5.0 is being witnessed on all fronts with Microsoft offering strong development tools and services for applications, which help make NT a suitable platform for businesses wanting to easily link up their applications to their network operating system. Still, Novell's long-standing strength and continued investment over the years proves to have paid back, resulting in its ability to fight off the Microsoft challenge so far.

EasyScroll mouse from Genius

● In keeping with its reputation for creative mouse-deigns, Genius has introduced a a special unit called the 'Easy Scroll' which includes a 'roller' and incorporates a relaxing design, that fits comfortably into a user's palm.



The Jordan distributor for Genius products is Al Ra'ed Al Arabi Computer Corp. (RACC).

Tulip Computers in Jordan

● A new computer brand has entered Jordan. Tulip Computers, based in Holland, is one of Europe's top PC manufacturers.

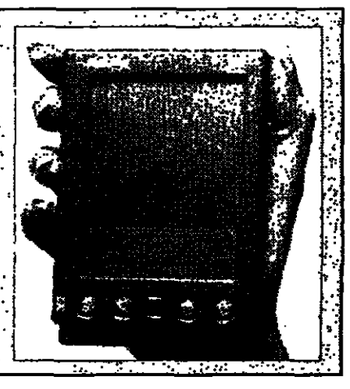
Recently, Tulip appointed a local company, Arab Info-Tech, as their Jordan distributors for a range of Tulip products. The range includes the Tulip Motion Line notebooks, the VisionLine desktop computers and high-end servers (4X Intel Pentium Pro). processors).

Palm Pilot from 3 Com

THANKS TO its ease of use, the Palm Pilot has become the market leader in the hand-held segment. It is supported by over 3000 software developers, due to its reliability.

Weighing 5.7 ounces, it is quite compact and comes with six control keys, and a stylus pen. Built-in software will cover all the users needs, including email requirements (though their is a need to hook up to a modem for that).

The Palm Pilot is available in Jordan from Saadi Communication Systems (SCS). ■



INTERFACE
BY ZEID NASSER

On-line advertising, Jordan's potential:

E-Markets to grow

'THE INTERNET is the last marketing frontier', so claim marketing and advertising professionals.

Already, the volume of advertising on the Internet has broken the $300 million mark, for the first quarter of 1998.

So, from the looks of it, it would be fair to assume that Internet advertising will record over $ 1 billion by the end of the year.

This is a huge figure, considering that the Internet is a relatively new medium, and bearing in mind that advertisers are still not really sure of the nature of response and feedback they will receive.

Of course, calculated as a percentage of total advertising spend worldwide, Internet advertising is little. Mainstream advertising media, including TV, print, outdoor and others still gobble up most of advertising spend worldwide.

Still, the Internet is 'untapped' because it supposedly provides a potential audience of more that 100 million people around the globe. So, some would say that the opportunities are endless.

In any case, what we are most concerned about at this stage is whether or not the Middle East market is adopting this trend. Is there a considerable Internet or on-line advertising spend by advertisers in the region?

The answer, regrettably, is no. As of yet, clients and advertising agencies do not believe in the necessity of the Internet as an integral part of marketing communications in the Middle East. There are, of course, reasons way this is the case. The main reason being that the number potential customers on the Internet, based in the Middle East, constitutes such a minute percentage of the total global Internet community. The number of Arabs or Middle Eastern nationals on-line, is far too small to warrant serious advertising spending on-line.

But, in certain venues, on-line advertising makes a lot of sense; especially inside on-line services— subscription services with guaranteed audiences— and bulletin board services in general. Inside these services, advertising rates are relatively low, considering the guaranteed audience offered. Also, advertising can be easily targeted at specific clients. Unlike a typical Web site, which maybe visited by users from the USA, the United Kingdom, Malaysia, Japan, South Africa, Saudi Arabia and Jordan, on-line subscription services will offer you Jordanian users only. Examples of this include Global One's latest alliance with Arabia.On.Line, which has marked the birth of such a pioneering on-line service, called Baladna. Other on-line services— bulletin board services— in the country also offer the same exclusivity in audiences, although they range in the numbers of users from several hundred, to a few thousand.

Different companies in Jordan that sell all sorts of products and services will soon enter the on-line advertising world.

Commercial sponsorship and advertising could be beneficial for users, if it means better on-line services which can guarantee their continuity because of increased income.

For us users, Internet advertising could be useful in other ways. Don't we all need to know what's going on in town? After all, if entertainment and cultural outlets in Amman begin to promote themselves on-line, we will have access to full information on what's on, with the click of a mouse button. This is what the Internet is all about; Information at your fingertips. If on-line services have to charge a fee to businesses for this kind of promotion, then so be it. ■

Americans are a tour de force in Iran

By Christopher Reynolds

MASHHAD, IRAN—Welcome to the Homa Hotel, the most comfortable lodging in perhaps Iran's holiest city. Come on in and relax. Or, to quote the hotel management's greeting more precisely, 'Down with USA.'

So say the foot-high polished brass letters (in English) above the lobby entrance. But here in the first days of the rebirth of Iranian tourism, nothing is simple. You may come for the soaring architecture and painstaking tile work, but odds are that the people will steal the show.

You may despise the politics, but you might find yourself dwelling on the culture. You may fear accusations of CIA ties (and they might be true), but it's more likely that you'll be enveloped by unstinting hospitality.

Before you can formulate a response to the message over the door, a bellman rushes up, takes your bag and grins broadly. "Good afternoon, Sir," he says in English. "Please, this way." At the reception desk, beneath a glowering portrait of the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, a clerk says, "Welcome Sir, please." When you hand over your US passport, he offers another encouraging smile.

And then, when you return downstairs for dinner an hour later, you find two dozen tourists with two sets of tour guides and drivers, the whole lot only 25 paces beyond the 'Down with USA' sign. These two tour groups, merrily spooning yogurt and gnawing flat bread, are the only customers in the restaurant. They are all Americans.

"My friends all asked me why," sighs June Berger of Baltimore, who is among those at the table, "but if you have to ask me why, then you'll never understand."

Last year, shortly before the election landslide that gave Iran's Presidency to moderate Mohammad Khatami, his economically strapped government began issuing tourist visas to American groups. Now Khatami does battle with anti-American conservatives still in the government, speaks of cultural exchanges, and has nudged foreign tourist visitation up to an estimated 50,000 yearly.

Half a dozen US-based tour companies have stepped up to seize the moment. Two of the most active, California-based Distant Horizons and San Francisco-based Geographic Expeditions, sold spaces on their tours so rapidly this year that they added extra departures. Soudabeh Hassani, marketing director for Pasargad, the Iranian tour company that works with major US companies bringing travellers to Iran, reports that from May 1997 to May 1998, her company brought in 582 Americans.

It's long been legal for Americans to visit Iran. It just hasn't been particularly popular during these last 19 years, since the fall of the Shah, the sacking of the US Embassy, the rise of a fundamentalist Islamic state, and the 444-day ordeal of the hostages who were taken during the revolution's early days.

For the last few years, the US State Department's advice has been to avoid Iran because of the 'generally anti-American atmosphere.' Earlier this year, the State Department labeled Iran the planet's leading government sponsor of terrorism, blaming the Iranian leadership for 13 assassinations worldwide last year. Then in April, the State Department slightly softened its warning to tourists (though they're still urged to stay away). Then on June 17, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright declared that, "it is time to test the possibilities of bridging the gap with Iran."

Most American tour groups plot out two-week itineraries and, confronting a country more than twice the size of Texas, use internal flights for most city-to-city travel. But the Geographic Expeditions itinerary that June Berger chose included 22 days on the ground in Iran.

Between 9th May and 1st June, the seven travelers on this Geographic tour, along with one US-based tour leader, one full-time Iranian guide, a driver—and, myself for the last half of the trip—will cross 4,000 miles of Iran by a 38-seat air-conditioned Volvo bus.



Iranians and foreigners tour EsfahanÕs vast Imam Square, a former polo ground, in hand-painted coaches. Photo by Christopher

In the beginning, this plan looked truly daunting. That muggy first night at the Laleh Hotel in Tehran, where the air-conditioning was out, and the towels still had Inter-Continental written on them even though that hotel company had cleared out during the Carter administration, Ann Wise was so desperate to cool down that she napped on the tiled floor of her bathroom.

A few days later near Tabriz, the Americans attracted so many onlookers that police cleared a marketplace area to avoid pedestrian gridlock.

But now, midtour, things have smoothed out. The Americans are reconciled to the absence of alcohol, the ubiquity of kebab, the requirement that foreign and Iranian women alike keep themselves covered with loose garments required by Islamic law.

In the bazaar, the Americans pay cash (the merchants prefer dollars over Iranian rials) because US economic sanctions against Iran make American-issued credit cards useless and US travelers checks impractical.

Today in Mashhad, the top attraction is the Shrine of Imam Reza, a mosque-and-museum complex that attracts millions of Iranian pilgrims every year. In 1997, the shrine's visitor book showed that 129 Americans had passed by.

As at Mecca, photographs inside the shrine are forbidden, but the scene is easily enough remembered. The shrine's minarets rise more than 120 feet next to a blue-green dome, and there are seven tons of gold in the complex. Maintenance is handled by a staff of 15,000, and the detailed work is daunting.

George Gordon, a 74-year-old retired defense analyst from Falls Church, Va., who confides that he spent several years in the 1970s with the CIA, analyzing the Cold War military buildup, stares at the mosaic tile work for a long, quiet moment.

Now, he says, "I think I can understand how the Iranian students were able to paste together all those shredded documents from the US Embassy. A lot of patience."

About midway between Mashhad and Kerman, in the middle of all that dry open space, the bus rumbles to a stop amid walnut and mulberry trees. Under a sky the color of yogurt, the Americans scramble up a brush-covered hill to inspect an old Zoroastrian fire temple that dates back to the 4th century. Tour leader Hooman Aprin, who was born in Iran in 1950 and moved to the United States in 1966, recruits a boy from the neighboring village, and they climb to the top of the fire temple. Soon, other village children and their parents are on the scene. June Berger places an orange poppy in the hair of a little girl, and a spell of cross-cultural nodding and smiling is cast.

We are all surrounded by children in mosques, beseeched by teenagers for autographs. In public parks, strangers stop them to practice their English and proclaim their affection for the American people. In traffic-choked Tehran, an affluent grandmother approaches me to reminisce about the years she spent in California, long before the revolution, and to pass on a common nickname for the estimated 55,000 people of Iranian descent who live in Los Angeles County: 'Tehrangeles.'

In the canyon hamlet of Abyaneh, outside Tehran, a tender, round old woman named Gohar Mohseni called down from an upstairs window to invite all of us into her two-room clay home. From a gleaming silver samovar, she pours everyone a cup of tea, then invites the group onto her roof to sell us some dried fruit. As her great-grandmother probably did, she measures the kilograms on a battered old counterweight scale.

The most common refrain, from town to town, is: 'Never mind your government and my government. Welcome.'

Now Mashhad is far behind us, and the bus stops again, this time by the gates of a religious school. Within minutes, the Americans are surrounded by shy villagers bearing tea trays, children skittering at their feet. The village's custom, cultivated through years of desert-dwelling, is to provide food, drink and lodging to any visitor, asking nothing in return.

All these warm welcomes notwithstanding, a tourist never stops wondering about the Iranian leadership's fluctuating view of the United States. In the southern desert town of Tabas, Aprin notes, the government no longer displays the US helicopter wreckage from President Carter's doomed hostage-rescue mission, which ended nearby. In Tehran, we roll past the former US Embassy, now a government-run military college, but when someone suggests stopping for photos, the bus keeps on going.

Personal connections between Americans and Iranians, the travelers agree, have been the most memorable part of the trip.

On Day 17, the tour reaches Esfahan, the grand capital of Iranian tourism, and turns a psychological corner. The Iran of spontaneous roadside discoveries is largely over.

Now, in a mile-high metropolis at the foot of the Zagros Mountains, with the Zayandeh River rushing through the middle of town, we all go shopping.

The river is crossed by several elegant bridges, which teem by night with pedestrians out to enjoy the cool of the evening, perhaps eating ice cream or smoking a water pipe.

The city's hub, and perhaps the most impressive collection of architecture in all Iran, is Imam Square. An epic rectangle bordered by two mosques, one 17th century palace and a lively bazaar, the open area is twice the size of Red Square in Moscow.

When a chance for a mid afternoon siesta arrives on Day 19, most of the travelers collapse into their rooms at the Abbasi Hotel, a former caravan stop and courtyard that was transformed in 1958 into the grandest hotel in the country. But Ron and June Berger instead enlist the guides' help and make a quiet visit, half a mile from the hotel. Their destination: the only active synagogue in Esfahan.

The rabbi and his family, whose home adjoins the synagogue, are startled at the arrival of these American Jews (and their translators), and then happily tearful. On a good week, the rabbi tells the Bergers, 500 or 600 Iranian Jews gather in the synagogue.

Last stop, Tehran. Over dinner, Ann Wise decides that the mountains in the northwest, at the beginning of the trip, were her favorite territory. Ron Berger is partial to Persepolis. George Gordon flashes back to an afternoon in Esfahan. ■

LA Times-Washington Post News Service